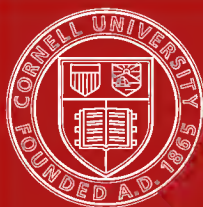


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A DIVORCE

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BY

PAUL BOURGET

OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1909

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A DIVORCE

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CHAPTER I

AN INEXTRICABLE DIFFICULTY

WHEN Madame Albert Darras had turned out of the rue de Vaugirard to go into the rue Servandoni, the sight of the narrow, gloomy street of old houses, although so close to the rue du Luxembourg where she lived, only served to increase her fears. She had been there hundreds of times before, without ever having noticed the dreary aspect of this corner of Paris, which suddenly struck her in her present state of mind. She stopped a moment to look at the dilapidated, crowded frontages collapsing on their foundations, the deserted pavement without pedestrians, almost without shops, the high grey wall of Saint Sulpice at the end, and over this dismal silence, the oppression of a cold March sky, black and dense. Though on the point of taking a momentous step, which threatened to upset her innermost existence, the poor harassed woman again felt her resolution weaken, a resolution which had been well pondered and cherished for many days, with countless struggles! A final expression of conflict passed over her face, still

pretty after forty years, with its well-preserved, refined features, an unimpaired delicacy of complexion, and an indefinable agitation which betrayed a keenly acute sensibility. In spite of her absorbing anxiety she did not look her age. The slender figure, the elastic step, the graceful poise of the head, harmonised with the idea of youth which the silver threads mingling with the gold of her hair, and the dark rings under her eyes, half dead with exhaustion, hardly belied. Though sleepless nights had encircled her large eyes with a scarcely perceptible shade, their soft brilliancy, which added a further charm to her blonde beauty, had not been dulled. The elegance, unobtrusive and yet emphasised, of her dress, testified to her consciousness and understanding of her beauty. She had obviously wished for an artistically harmonious effect of quiet and warm shades. A bunch of Parma violets relieved her otter-skin toque, and her coat of the same fur was worn over a violet cloth skirt. Certain costumes, in Paris, by their minute finish and faultless cut, class a woman as certainly as a uniform and galloons denote the rank of an officer. Everything to do with Gabrielle Darras, from the bracelets which glittered on her wrists just outside her muff, to the dainty shoes appearing beneath the long pleated skirt, betokened a woman of the French upper middle class, a satisfied and unobtrusive class, in which, notwithstanding the encroachment of foreign ideas, the traditional taste of our country is perpetuated. Alas! if the slightly

studied character of the costume revealed in the woman who had conceived it, a desire to please and to keep her rank, only too natural—as the continuation of this story will show—in an anomalous position, both coquetry and vanity belonged already to the past, with the years of happiness which alone had kept fresh the flower of youth in the dawning autumn of her age. The present was the anxiety which brought her to a standstill on the pavement of the old street, the final hesitation before a visit which might destroy her peace of mind for ever, the distress of a moral agony in an acute stage, which resolves itself suddenly in a violent determination. With a half-defined gesture of indignant impatience, Madame Darras, as if to spur on her weakening energy, said softly to herself:

“Nothing will have changed to-morrow, nothing, nothing, nothing. . . . What is the use of waiting?”

With a step, firm once more, she went on, her head up, looking at the numbers one after the other; till she came to the house she was seeking, the dilapidated appearance of which made her shudder again. The building, facing north and ominously damp, dated from a period when the street, in which the gravedigger of Saint Sulpice had long lived, was called the rue des Fossoyeurs. Nothing had changed for a hundred years in this house, built at two separate periods, one part under the Directory, the other under the Empire, on the

remains of some convent garden, by one of the cheap contractors who abounded in those days. Owing to the universal confusion caused by war, they had only poor apprentices, without technical education, at their service. Such buildings, therefore, as the restoration of modern Paris has spared, are examples of bungled masonry and ignorant architecture. The house in its entirety was composed of a main-building, two storeys high, joined by wings at the corners to a sort of frontal building, evidently built first, and decorated with a pretentious row of busts copied from the antique: an Antinous, an Apollo, a Diana. Iron crosses were fixed all over the cracked plaster of the walls, which no longer held together without the help of clamps. Built as it was, it formed a little world of its own whose members had their outlet by separate staircases leading to a paved court, in the centre of which the porter had laid out a fantastic little garden. Shrubs, planted in tubs, put forth a scanty foliage in the sunless atmosphere. There were metal cisterns, old petroleum tins, preserve boxes, filled with soil. Out of these climbing plants were to grow and twine themselves round a trellis of wood and wire, erected in the form of a little bower. The ingenious fellow was engaged in developing this rustic contrivance still further, when Madame Darras, after having knocked on the window-panes of the porter's lodge in vain, pushed open the wicket gate which separated the entrance hall from the court-yard. At the sound of the

bell, the amateur gardener looked round, without however troubling to stop working, and in answer to his visitor's question preferred in a half-muffled voice:—Is the Abbé Euvrard at home? . . . he replied almost rudely: “I can't say. . . . You had better go up and see. The staircase on the left, second floor, first door on the right. He is a very learned man, so they say, and wise men always live in the clouds. . . .”

The roughness of his speech only showed that he served a house of poor and over-numerous tenants and received very few gratuities. Madame Darras blushed as if she had had a personal affront. Although this visit of hers to the old priest, held in so little esteem by the porter, was not in any way compromising, still she had come unknown to her household, and above all, unknown to her husband. In her remorse at her clandestine action, it seemed to her that the insolent look of the under-bred man interpreted her presence there in an insulting way. Hurrying along, her head bowed, she went through the door he pointed out to her, and up the wooden, uncarpeted staircase, with its dirty and uneven steps. Had she been capable of reflecting at that moment, she would have been struck by the contrast between the miserable lodging in which the man she sought had taken refuge, and the place where she had been to ask for him some days before. In future we will give the Reverend Father Euvrard the title to which he has the right as an Oratorian. He appeared under this title in

the Annual of the Institute, as an independent member of the Academy of Science, before the promulgation of the abominable measures of 1903 against the religious orders. His address then was No. 4, rue des Célestins, all that remains of the magnificent Hôtel Fieubet, built by Mansart, and occupied by the Oratorians as the Collège Massillon. It is indeed discreditable in the last degree to a government and a country, that an illustrious mathematician, approaching old age, should be compelled to leave his community and quiet study, to take refuge in a wretched lodging, and live parsimoniously on his pension and occasional uncertain and ill-paid work. But even if Madame Darras had been able to realise the true meaning for the priest of this little drama, the upset of his harmless ways, the necessity of providing for the wants of material existence, above all the separation from his brethren, such a trial might have appeared morally insignificant to her, compared to the tragedy of family life which she herself was about to precipitate, and of which this visit to the rue Servandoni formed but an episode. As yet the tragedy was latent, but already the terror of future conflicts acted so strongly on her nerves that when she had reached the second storey and rung the bell of the door on the right, as the porter had directed, she was obliged to lean for support on the banisters. Steps were heard approaching. They echoed physically in her heart. It was the priest who stopped short, after opening the door, disconcerted for a moment, at the sight

of his unexpected visitor. The ring at the door had found him at work at the blackboard. He still held a piece of white chalk in his hand. His shabby cassock and unshaven chin, his uncut reddish hair, which even at sixty showed little grey, betokened the negligence of the scholar for whom the outer world and their personal appearance hardly exist. He would have looked almost comical with his short, narrow-chested figure and rosy, florid face, had it not been for the noble cast of his lined and furrowed brow:—a brow such as Lavater would have called that of a “searcher after truth,”—and the extraordinary beauty of his blue eyes, which still sparkled with the freshness and transparency of youth. His frankly astonished expression at that moment, was the half-waking bewilderment of a mathematician who has been transported a hundred miles from the present, on the powerful wings of some chimerical problem. As Madame Darras did not speak, too much surprised for a moment by the totally different appearance of the celebrated Oratorian from anything she had imagined, he broke the silence.

“You must have mistaken the door, Madame,” said he simply.

“No,” said she, “you are M. Euvrard, the Reverend Father Euvrard?” and without allowing him time to answer, otherwise than by a sign, “My Father,” she urged, “I implore you to receive me. I come to you without any introduction, because I have so often heard people

sound the praises of your noble character, and of your large heart; and just now I have much need of sympathy."

Thus speaking, she advanced into the narrow passage. The priest, almost mechanically, yielded to the suggestion of this movement. He led the unknown woman into the poor room which served him as a library. His face could not, however, conceal the vexation which he felt, and which was not caused merely by the interruption of his meditations. This woman's dress, her beauty, her troubled air, and her importunity, gave him the impression that he had before him a woman of the world, caught in some adventure of passion. To a book-worm, who had lived in his study, and who had scarcely ever performed his functions as a priest, since he had taken orders after leaving the Polytechnic School, the prospect of playing the part of adviser in an affair so far removed from the matters which usually occupied his thoughts, already disconcerted him. However, as he was a priest, and a good priest, this lack of sympathy made him feel ashamed. In clearing away the papers from his only arm-chair his impatience disclosed itself, and he justified it as best he could, throwing the blame of his impolite vexation upon the disorderly state of his room. His removal dated two weeks back, and he had not yet arranged his books, which had been laid in heaps, between bundles of notes and of portfolios, upon the deal shelves lining the walls of his study.

A second-hand carpet covered part of the rough, cheerless floor; four rush-bottomed chairs, a corner desk, and a prie-Dieu completed the furniture of what was but a cell. The room was lighted by two windows, to which the scholar had nailed, with his own hands and all awry, a pair of curtains, bought ready-made and too short. There was no fire, and the marble chimney-piece supported, near a spirit lamp, a saucepan, an earthen filter, and the remains of a breakfast—two boiled eggs and a cup of coffee. The host of this mean lodging prepared his own meals with much indifference, as one might gather from the blackboard placed upon an easel between the windows, and covered with the cabalistic scrawls which constituted his intellectual retreat from the world. He pointed these out by a gesture as he offered the chair to the lady, and he said: "I blush, Madame, to receive you in such an untidy den. Since you know my name you will know also that I am an outlaw. It seems that I have brought danger to the state by tracing these formulas in a house where other Fathers study history, archæology, and Hebrew. Let us hope that the poor state is safe now."

He laughed at this mild sarcasm, his only retaliation against his persecutors. Then his own words having led him back by a natural association to his first idea, "Amongst these Fathers several used to give counsel, and still do so. Perhaps it would be better if I were to give you the address of one of these? If you need

practical advice, a mathematician is but little qualified to give it you. Our science——”

“It is precisely your reputation for learning,” interrupted Madame Darras, “which influenced me in undertaking this visit.

“As I told you, I have often heard of you, in the first place from my husband. He is an old pupil of the Polytechnic School, like yourself it seems, though certainly he is not suspected of any partiality towards the cloth. Because of this I shall ask you not to mention my name. He and his friends hold your works in great estimation. And then, you had the son of one of my friends as a pupil at Juilly. From my husband I heard of your great learning; I became acquainted through my friend with your great kindness, and when I sought a priest to whom I could speak in a momentous hour of my life, your name came to my mind for these two reasons. My situation is so exceptional that I shrink from consulting an ordinary ecclesiastic with his narrow mind. There are so many who seem to make it their sole ideal to estrange souls still further from God.”

“I am at your service, Madame,” replied the Oratorian. “It is unnecessary for you to tell me your name; I prefer not to know it.” The enigmatical last phrase used by this singular visitor had confirmed his suspicions. Persuaded that he was going to receive the confession of a repentant sinner, the priest in the mathematician began to be awakened. The profound

saying of the apostle: *Omnibus omnia factus sum*, will be always the emblem of a heart truly sacerdotal.

Madame Darras saw an expression of grave attention replace upon his suddenly transformed face the rather droll confusion which had disconcerted her. Those blue eyes, veiled just before in a cloud of distraction, fixed themselves upon her with singular directness and the accents of the priest assumed an authority, at once indulgent and imperious like that of the doctor at the bedside, as he added, "I repeat to you, however, that I am less qualified than one of those ecclesiastics whom you have miscalled ordinary, and who have had more experience in such matters than I have. But, since you have asked for my feeble light, what is it you wish?"

"It is, my Father,"—and in this woman's voice there thrilled the touching sincerity of one who prepares herself to lay bare an internal wound which she has for a long time hidden from the world,—“it is that I have been tormented for weeks, for months, by a desire to become reconciled to God, by a desire which has now become so acute as to be insufferable. I was very devout when I was young. Afterwards I ceased to be so. I had doubts. It seemed to me that I could no longer believe, and for twelve years I have left off religious exercises. I say that it *seemed* to me, because I have never failed to recognise the beneficent influence of religion. The proof of this is that, having a daughter, I wished her to be baptised. This was not accomplished

without a struggle. The child has grown; she is eleven years of age. She is going to take her first Communion."

Madame Darras stopped as if, having now come to a part of her story involving her more intimate thoughts and feelings, she could no longer find appropriate words. This embarrassment, the indirect and hesitating character of her opening statement, and, further, the coincidence between the time at which her child had been born, and the date when the mother had withdrawn herself from the sacraments of the Church, all these indications harmonised only too well with the hypothesis already formed in the mind of M. Euvrard. This woman was married. She had said so herself. She had committed a sin. Her child was not by her husband. Her allusion to priests who alienate souls still further from God had been inspired no doubt by her having encountered an over-severe confessor. M. Euvrard thought the best course would be to make the painful confession more easy for her. "Your child will owe to you the salvation of her soul," he said, "and to have saved a soul blots out many sins, especially when these faults may have had, if not as an excuse, at least as an explanation, some overpowering impulse. Take courage, Madame."

As he spoke a blush came to the cheeks of the unknown lady. The poor Oratorian felt himself blush too. The flash of pride kindled in the glance of his visitor revealed to him his mistake concerning the

nature of her appeal. No. This was no repentant heroine of a vulgar story of adultery, and he listened to her as she continued to reveal her confidences in a voice now rendered firm by her resentment against his suspicion.

"No, my Father, no; I have nothing with which to reproach myself of the kind you think. I am a virtuous woman. If I have ceased to practise my religious exercises, I have nothing for which to blush in the motive. I have committed no sin. I have always been loyal. I had no remorse in being out of the Church. I was at peace with my conscience. I have told you I had lost faith. That faith slumbered. It has been awakened by the contemplation of my daughter's faith. It is this which brings me here. How this work has been accomplished I do not know myself. There has been a train of very ordinary events. When Jeanne had to go to her catechism class, I accompanied her to that little underground chapel of Saint Sulpice, at the end of your street, where I went too when I was her age. All my former emotions revived as I shared her feelings. I saw her fervent as I had once been, her spirit open itself to religious ideas as mine had opened, the love of God take possession of her as of me in former times. Was it my childhood which lived again in my heart? Was it something else? I repeat to you I do not know. I began to go to Mass again on account of Jeanne, and as a matter of form. I began to pray again, impelled to do

so at first by a feeling of regret. I gave myself up to that feeling for the past which makes us love to revisit the places where we lived when we were young, to meet again kindred who have been lost to sight for many years, to see our old friends. A time came when I realised that this past was once more the present. I became conscious of God. I became conscious of my soul. Yes, there is a God, and He listens to us. We have a soul which comes from Him, which lives in Him. These two obvious facts impressed themselves upon me, ever more clearly, ever more powerfully, in no other way than by supervising my daughter at her prayers; every morning and every evening I listened to her saying the words 'Our Father' and saw clearly into the depths of her being. I saw there absolute faith in the goodness of this heavenly father. I said to myself, I was forced to say to myself, if this heart, so pure, so tender, so sincere, is deceived in that confidence, nothing in this world can have meaning, sense, or import. Is it possible? Life would be a horrible nightmare if transports like those of that child towards her Creator were only an illusion. The mother in me yielded itself to that idea. But, oh, this point has not been reached without struggles! The arguments which I had heard urged against religion arose again, but none of them were of any avail against the voice of the good God. Why attempt to argue when one feels, when a reality is there before you, actual as yourself, as the air which you breathe, as the

objects which you touch? I believed again. I no longer strove against a feeling so much the stronger because it brought me into closer intimacy with my child and with all the emotions of her growing piety. The more I partook of these emotions, the more I loved my child, and also the more I believed in God. You cannot imagine what ardour of love the prospect of her first Communion stirs in her; how her tenderness and her intelligence are exalted and illumined by that prospect; what miracles of perfection I witness daily in that young heart. It is God whom I see directing her and, through her, directing me also. But it is not to tell you in detail this transformation in my thoughts that I am here, my Father. I have said enough to enable you to understand through what experiences I have passed, and how I have attained to this desire which includes all the rest: Jeanne goes to her first Communion in three weeks; I wish to go to Communion with her."

"You have not only saved your daughter's soul," replied the priest; "you have saved your own, Madame. Do not let your long estrangement from God trouble you. You called Him the good God and you were right. He asks only an opportunity to pardon you. Our Lord is always with us. You are right in believing that He directs you. He it is who has guided you hour by hour to the present time; be sure of that. You wish to go to Communion. How simple! I am ready to receive your confession whenever you desire; here—at once."

The worthy man spoke in a tone softened by regret for his first mistake. Her story awakened in him a very singular feeling. If he had the failings to which the abstract mind is subject, he had also its advantages, amongst others that power of mystic absorption which so often accompanies mathematical genius, as in the case of Pascal, Leibnitz, Newton, or, in our own day, Cauchy, Puiseux, and Hermitte. An effort was needed when he expected the narration of a love story, but his interest was at once excited to the highest point by this avowal, marked though it was by little intellectual grasp or logical cohesion. He saw in it, as did Jeanne's mother, the mysterious communion of God and a soul. Still, one of the elements of the problem seemed to require explanation. When she regained her faith why had she not gone immediately to the sacraments? Why this delay? Why this difficulty in returning? Her vigorous insistence on her virtue put aside all suspicion of a guilty secret. M. Euvrard had no idea that he, as a priest and in virtue of his sacred office, was the immovable barrier which she foresaw between her and the Church, and the next minute he was listening with wonder mingled with dismay as she repeated one of his last phrases.

"No, Father, it is not so simple. It is necessary that you should know more, and that I should tell you who I am and why you see me so agitated. I am married; I have already told you that. I ought to add that this is

my second marriage and that my first husband is still living."

"Then," asked the priest after a silence, "you are divorced and remarried?"

"Yes," said she.

"And your daughter?"

"My daughter is born of my second marriage."

"You are divorced and remarried," repeated M. Euvrard, and, as if speaking to himself, "Poor woman! I understand everything."

Then turning to her: "No. It is not easy. You cannot go to Communion, living in such a way. I must not even receive your confession. I could not give you absolution."

He pronounced these last words with none of the timidity of the scholar disturbed in his studies. There was no longer in his voice the pity of an old man touched by a sad confession. The priest pronounced in the name of his faith a sentence founded upon an immutable law and from which there was no appeal. The anxious face of Madame Darras became still more contracted on hearing his sentence, though she betrayed no surprise. She showed only deeper despondency as she replied, "I knew your answer beforehand, Father; I have heard it already, as you guessed, I dare say, from what I told you. I have spoken to another priest, and he stopped me at once just as you did. I know too the condition you are going to impose upon me; to leave my husband. Let me re-

peat to you what I said to the other priest. Thirteen years ago I was twenty-nine years of age. I was the most unhappy of women. The man to whom my family married me, and from whom I was obliged to separate, had applied to have our separation converted into a divorce and had succeeded. He married again. I was left alone in the world with a son nine years old, of whom the Courts had given me the guardianship. How was I to bring him up? How overcome all the difficulties with which a divorced woman is beset even when she has right on her side? It was then that another man, whom I had known at home, but only slightly, of whom I had quite lost sight after my marriage, came back into my life. I found he had loved me as a young girl, but had never told his love. He was poor then, and I was rich. He never married because of me. He struggled to win me when I was free, and to forget me when I was no longer free. After the divorce he reappeared. He was prosperous now, occupied a brilliant position, and was thus able to marry whom he pleased. Faithful to his first love he asked me to marry him. I accepted this devotion and since that day his tenderness has never failed. He has been the best of husbands, to my son the best of fathers, and were it the price of my eternal salvation I would never leave him, never."

"I cannot quite understand then why you come to me," replied M. Euvrard, "nor, to use your own expression, what sympathy you need. You know enough

about the laws of the Church to be aware that your second marriage counts for nothing in her eyes and never could. By acting as you have done you have broken the laws of the Church. You persist in this infraction, and at the same time you speak of resuming a life of religion, and of participating again in the sacraments of the Church! The contradiction is so obvious that you have noticed it yourself. You wish to be both inside the Church and outside. To such a problem there is no solution."

"There is one," interrupted Madame Darras. Her earnestness showed how much importance she attached to this part of their interview. The colour returned to her cheeks. Her eyes flashed, and she repeated, "Yes, there is one solution, but it could only be accepted by a priest who was broad-minded, very broad-minded. That is why I came to submit my case to you. My second marriage does not count in the eyes of the Church. You tell me so and I know it. You add that it never can count. That is true so long as the first marriage exists. But if the first were broken? The Church does not recognise divorce. Good. But it recognises the annulment of a marriage. Thirteen years ago, when I entertained the idea of this second marriage, I thought of applying to Rome, but I did not. My future husband disliked the idea, and I thought little of religious belief at the time. Is it too late now? Since the Church compels me to submit to her laws she ought surely to give me the means of

doing so. The reasons I should have urged then, I will urge now. They have not lost their force. I told you my parents married me. If they did not use force in the material sense of that word, it is not the less true that they overruled my will. I was not a free agent, in any case I certainly did not know to whom I was being married. Had I known, I would have died rather than consent to such a detestable union. It was no mere case of incompatibility of temper. I put up with all his faults—he was the father of my son. Nor was it ordinary infidelity—he deceived me and I forgave him. But I could neither bear nor forgive a vice which is the most abject and the most degrading in the eyes of people of our class. He drank, and drunkenness made him a madman. During five years, I suffered for the sake of my son horrible scenes in which threats and actual brutality were not the most disgusting features. It was only when my life and that of my child were in danger that I found the courage to leave him. He had struck me with such violence that I took weeks to recover, and he was going to strike him, him! I ask you, Father, did I consent to marry a madman, and a wicked madman? Is there not in what I have told you sufficient cause for the breaking of a marriage in which both I and my parents were deceived? My Father, if I pledge myself to demand that annulment which I cannot fail to obtain; if I promise you that I will do everything to persuade my second husband to support me in this application, if

I promise that until then, though I live in the same house as my husband, I will live with him as a sister lives with her brother, will you not consider me as reconciled to the Church? Could I not confess and go to Communion with my daughter once at least—only this time?”

“No,” said the Oratorian, shaking his head with a melancholy in which severity was again overborne by pity, “you cannot. No priest could lend himself to a compromise which rests on no solid basis. The reasons you mention would not even justify a claim for the annulment of your marriage. You appear to believe, Madame, like many other worldly people, that Rome has power to loose the marriage bond. She has not. Rome recognises that there are marriages which are void, that is to say where certain conditions necessary to the validity of the marriage have not been complied with. The Church has decided upon these, and has defined them with a precision which leaves no chance for equivocation. Consult any work on theology and you will find that your case is not one in which an annulment can be granted. You acknowledge yourself that your marriage was voluntary when you say that if you had known your husband’s dreadful vice you would not have married him. It is obvious there was consent. It is true that you were revolted by his vicious habit, and I admit that it is detestable, that it is hideous. Still it was no deception committed against you, only a trial inflicted upon

you. When the Church blessed your marriage she did not promise to exempt you from trials. If they were too hard to bear, you had the remedy in separation, which the Church has always authorised. But she authorises separation only. To go further is to disobey the precept so clearly given in Scripture which forbids second marriage during the life of the first husband or wife. Annulment, as you understand it, would only be a sham divorce, and the Church has none of these accommodations. When she marries two people she binds them by a contract which cannot be broken, because it is sanctified by a sacrament. Do not hope to escape by that door; it is closed."

"What must I do then?" exclaimed Madame Darras, wringing her hands in distress. "Is it possible that God"—she dwelt upon this word with infinite sadness—"has ordained that I must abandon my home, must break the heart of the man whom I love and who loves me, must separate myself from my daughter, for my husband will not give her to me and he would have the law on his side, or else be denied religious life, be forbidden absolutely from kneeling side by side with my dear child in the same religious service during a momentous hour of her girlhood, and be cut off from pardon too? Is it possible, I ask you again, Father, that the law of man is more just, more charitable than that of God? For after all, when I was so unhappy, so indescribably unhappy, the one allowed me to renew my

life loyally, honestly. The other requires me to destroy it again; it barely consents not to fetter me to a hateful past, it forbids me from redeeming past mistakes. Ah, M. Euvrard! how in the face of this difference between Divine and human justice can you prevent the objections I have so often heard against religion from overpowering me again? My former faith, revived by contact with my daughter's piety, is being weakened, destroyed. I begin to doubt again. I suffered so much after my visit to the other priest that I said to myself—the adversaries of the Church are right: she is an instrument of oppression and of death; progress is accomplished without her, and in opposition to her, and in bemoaning my separation from her with such a poignant homesickness I am the dupe of a mirage, for the truth is not there!”

“Do not talk in that way,” said the Oratorian, speaking with animation. Instinctively he placed his old man's hand upon her arm to stop her in her blasphemy. “Above all do not harbour such a thought. You must not judge God. That would be to commit the only sin against the Holy Spirit which is never forgiven. Do you reproach the marriage laws of the Church for lacking justice and charity?” he continued. “Let me give you an illustration, commonplace it may be, but to the point. A ship has arrived at a port where a passenger wishes to land. It is of the highest importance for him; he wants, for instance, to see a dying father or to take part in a

law-suit upon which depends the welfare of his family—imagine anything you like. But a case of plague has broken out upon the boat and the authorities have forbidden that any passengers come ashore for fear of contagion. Would it be just, would it be kind to give way to the entreaty of the one traveller at the risk of spreading the plague in a city of a hundred thousand inhabitants? Clearly not. Here then is a case in which justice and charity demand the sacrifice of the individual interest for the general good. This principle dominates all society. If we are called upon to decide between two courses, the first clearly beneficial to the whole community and painful to some individual, the second agreeable to him but hurtful to the whole, both justice and charity demand that we shall adopt the first course. This is indeed the test which we must apply to every institution, and applying it to indissoluble marriage, what is the result? Society is composed of families, and the better the families the better will society be. Now think how much greater likelihood there is of healthy families where a system of indissoluble marriage prevails. If marriage is irrevocable it will be entered upon only after the most serious reflection; there will be greater closeness of bond between grandparents, parents, and children, since the family comprises fewer alien elements; there will be the chance of greater unity of spirit, of a common tradition. Marriage of this kind is the strongest pledge for that social permanence

without which there is nothing but anarchy and perpetual unrest. And here, history confirms reason. It teaches that all superior civilisations have developed towards monogamy. Now divorce is not monogamy; it is successive polygamy. I will not give you a course of sociology, but do you know what statistics show? Where divorce exists, the number of criminals, lunatics, and suicides is tenfold amongst divorced persons. Thus, for one who, like yourself and a few others, retains in his divorced condition the finer traits of heart and mind, the majority lose or debase them. To base social order upon the supposed needs of possible degenerates is to set up the abnormally low as a standard. You may call that progress, but science calls it retrogression.

“Note that we have been looking at the matter from the point of view of pure observation. Purposely, as I wished you to realise the identity there is between the law of the Church and the law of Society, between the teaching of experience and the teaching of Revelation. In its struggle for existence humanity has fallen back upon the very same rule of which the Church has made a dogma. Try to realise, in the light of these ideas, how seriously you have erred in availing yourself of the criminal law which the worst enemies of social well-being, the would-be destroyers of the family, have introduced into our Code. You yourself have assisted in this task of destruction as far as lay in your power. You sacrificed society to your own happiness. You and your

second husband have set up in a small way a type of the irregular home, one too all the more dangerous because your virtues enable you to set an example of decency in irregularity, and present an appearance of order in the midst of disorder. It is that which renders so dangerous the errors of the gifted; they retain their natural nobility even when they sin, they fall without becoming degraded. They cloak the deformity of evil and spread it all the more insidiously. You need not seek any other explanation for the difficulty you meet in your efforts to return to the Church. Realise the extent of your fault in the light of that difficulty, and thank God that He has not afflicted you and your family even more than He has done.

“Though it is but twenty years since that detestable law of divorce was passed, if you only knew how many tragedies I have seen it produce already, I who hear so few confessions; into what catastrophes households like yours have been plunged through their failure to discern the truth, which is yet stamped on every conscience, that liberty contrary to the laws of nature engenders servitude, neglected duty entails misfortune. I have seen fratricidal hatreds between the children of the first and second marriage, fathers and mothers judged and condemned by their sons and daughters; here, deadly antagonism between stepfather and stepson; there, between second wife and the husband's daughter. Elsewhere, I have seen jealousy of the past, of a past living because

the first husband lives, torture the second husband. Again, hideous struggles between the first husband and his former wife over their children's sick-bed, or, where the children have grown up, over a young man's follies or a daughter's marriage. Nor have I mentioned the ever recurring bitterness against the ill-will, open or dissembled, hypocritical or sincere, it does not matter which, of a world which after all retains intact its respect for Christian marriage. Ah! what misery have I not seen! Your lot is not the worst, softened as it is by the inestimable blessing of recovered faith. If you should ever deny that blessing it is then you must needs tremble. God's vengeance does not manifest itself in extraordinary occurrences. The logical outcome of our faults ensures our punishment. Part of this is necessary and inevitable, part, secondary, may be spared us in the mercy of Providence. That is why I spoke to you as I did just now, that you may never again harbour such thoughts. I was gravely alarmed for you."

Many and varying feelings agitated Madame Darras, as she listened to this philippic every phrase of which implied the shameful nature of a second marriage, contracted after much hesitation it is true, but seriously, and to which she clung with all the pride of her heart. Each one too roused in her the apprehension of fresh sorrows. What was a mere abstraction for the theologian was a living, bleeding reality for the divorced and remarried Catholic woman.

The almost scientific precision of his language, revealing involuntarily the professor and the apologist, impressed her strangely because it reminded her of innumerable conversations with her husband. She recognised the kinship of the priest's arguments, employed though they were in the advocacy of opposite convictions, to those of her husband, due to the common discipline of the same school. This reminder of the man whose name she bore was an added suffering. He would have been so cruelly surprised to have seen her *tête-à-tête* with this priest, listening without protest to his maxims and submitting to an influence so contrary to the moral unity of their household. He himself had vaunted the superiority of M. Euvrard's intellect without suspecting that at a critical moment these eulogies would contribute to enhance the mathematician's authority with a woman who had never pleaded any save sentimental reasons for her religious needs. Now for the first time a scholar, whose superiority she well knew, gave her intellectual reasons for religious belief. At the same time an expression which had escaped the priest in his vehemence, "degenerates," hurt, almost angered her. When at last the Oratorian concluded, one alone of these many different emotions reigned in her mind. Led thereto solely by the inflexible rigour of his doctrine, he had uttered the warning best fitted to dismay an overwrought heart in which new-born piety had commenced to awaken hidden and unconquerable remorse. She had

been long haunted and beset by the fear of some retribution suspended over the twelve years of a happiness which she no longer dared believe legitimate. It was the desire to escape from this constant apprehension which caused her passionate longing to accompany her daughter to Communion and be reconciled to the Church. When the priest spoke of trials to which she and her husband might be put, she had shuddered, and her fear increased as the priest insisted upon this point. Chance would have it that one of the catastrophes mentioned by him was exactly the one she dreaded more than any other and with greater reason—as will be made evident in the recital of the tragedy to which this scene is but a prologue. The agreement between her most secret anxiety and some of the words used by M. Euvrard impressed her so strongly with the idea that this was a prophetic warning that she was unable to discuss the matter with him. Besides, what was the use, seeing that upon the main question he gave her no hope?

“I cannot argue with you, Father,” she finished by saying, “I am but an ignorant woman. I came to implore assistance from you as a priest and you have refused to give it. Your decision seems to me very hard, but I accept it. You have founded it upon reasons which seemed right as you gave them, though they have harrowed my soul. Another time, if you will allow me to come again, I may be able to formulate some objec-

tions which I cannot express now, though I feel them in my heart. Before taking leave I should like to ask you one more question. You told me that I was an exception compared with other divorced people. I do not believe it. But if your judgment upon me is too lenient it means one thing at least. It proves that you admit degrees of guiltiness in the case of divorced women who marry again. In your eyes they are not all equally removed from what you consider the right way. Surely then there must be degrees of sinfulness in the case of separation from the Church. You tell me that the absolute reconciliation I had dreamt of is impossible. If I cannot have a complete religious life, am I condemned to have no religious life at all? Is there no middle course between abandoning my home, which you insist upon as a condition to admission to the sacraments, and the complete unbelief in which I have lived so long? You yourself say that my return to faith, a return which has brought me to you, is a sign of divine grace; can you not tell me some means of responding to it that is not beyond my strength? You see, Father, I want our conversation to have some practical result."

"I have not ordered you to abandon your home," said M. Euvrard, correcting her; "at least not at present. If you wished to do so, I would ask you to consider. Here is a proof how hard it is to escape the consequences of our actions. If you left your home your daughter's

religious education would be compromised. Now which is the most imperative obligation? That is a point I should not care to settle. I have not settled it. I have definitely expressed my conviction—over-severe as you may think it—that you cannot partake of the sacraments so long as you persist in your present manner of living. At the same time your way of life, however wrong it may be, has its own duties. To fulfil these is always in a certain sense praiseworthy. You deserve commendation for having remembered your duty to your son in your second marriage. Your conduct will count to you for righteousness if, whenever you are in suffering, you take your trouble to God, above all if the suffering is connected with your second marriage, as in the case of the distress which will wring your heart when, upon the day of your daughter's first Communion, you see other mothers go to the altar whilst you must remain behind. You will do well, in the same sense, to give alms, to practise self-denial, to observe more rigorously certain precepts of the Church, Lent and fasting for example. I understand that your second husband is far removed from faith in God; much further removed than you have ever been. Your conduct will be praiseworthy above all, if you succeed in leading him back."

"Do not ask that of me, Father!" cried Madame Darras, whose face suddenly became quite haggard. She repeated, "Do not ask that of me. I will try to deserve divine forgiveness by doing everything else you

have recommended, no matter at what cost, but I cannot speak to my husband upon religious questions, and thus lay bare what I really think upon the subject. Recollect, Father, he has not the least suspicion of my mental anguish about my daughter's first Communion. I have taken so much care to hide it from him. It would cause him too much suffering."

"He consented, however, to his daughter's baptism?" said M. Euvrard.

"I made it a condition of our marriage," responded Madame Darras, "that our children should be Catholics. He has kept his word—he is the most honourable of men—but with what inner revolt against what he considers to be a miserable superstition! Interested though he is in the smallest details concerning the little girl, he sees me take her to Mass or to catechism and never asks the least question. That part of her life does not exist for him. As for me, he is persuaded that in bringing up the child in this way I am yielding to a sentimental prejudice. He overlooks it as a feminine weakness. He loves me and he believes that at the bottom of my heart I am at one with him. He has always wished so much that our ideas should be the same. For a long time they were, and I should not have the heart to tell him that they are so no longer."

"Then," asked the priest, with a little hesitation, "you did not tell him that you were coming to me?"

"To you? No," and her tone betrayed her terror at the mere idea.

"And when you return you will not tell him of this visit?"

"No," she repeated.

"But you must speak to him about it," said the Oratorian. He repeated: "Yes, you must. For your own sake in the first place, for your own self-respect. You could not take a step so serious and conceal it from the man who is the father of your daughter, whose name you bear, and under whose roof you live. It would be a lie, if only a negative one, and would be in too flagrant contradiction with the line of conduct which we agreed you ought to follow. For my sake also you must do so. You would not wish me to countenance a clandestine visit. You have told me that my name is known to your home circle, that I am spoken of sympathetically. Your visit to me will cause the less surprise. And you could take the opportunity to break a silence which, considering the faith you hold, is very culpable. The Apostle has told us that we must believe in our heart and confess with our mouth to obtain salvation."

"No," said Madame Darras for the third time, shaking her head dejectedly, "I cannot do that. My Father," she continued in a voice of supplication, "you understand, do you not, that I cannot leave my husband, if it were only for my daughter's sake. To make known to him the crisis through which I am passing, would be to

run the risk of exasperating him so much! It might make him hostile to our child's participation in worship as soon as the first Communion was over. He did not pledge himself to countenance any very absorbing devotion to religion. I should dread too the effect upon my own faith of the discussions which would arise. I could have braved them if I had been supported by the sacraments; I was ready to do so, to ask my husband if he would agree to my taking steps at Rome, but without the sacraments, with a maimed and feeble religious life, I am not strong enough."

"Take the necessary time," replied M. Euvrard, "but make up your mind to have an explanation which can leave no doubt in your husband's mind concerning your religious feelings. That is your bare duty as a matter of ordinary right and wrong."

"You must allow me to think about all this, my Father," she said, almost trembling, and rising to go. "You will let me come back, won't you? Although our conversation has not answered my hopes it has relieved me of a heavy burden, of the silence which was suffocating me!"

"I should be very happy to see you again," replied the Oratorian, who was visibly troubled by this urgent yet timid question, "but I have told you that I cannot countenance clandestine visits. Come again when your visit will be known at home."

"And in the meantime?" she asked.

"Meanwhile, I shall pray that you may have entered, as far as prudence will allow, upon the duty of frank explanation."

"Then adieu, my Father," she said. "I am grateful to you all the same for having spared me one of your precious hours."

She pronounced her thanks mechanically, in a muffled voice, for had she not repressed her feelings she would have burst into tears. Her emotion touched the priest. He tried to soften what might have seemed hard in his last words by saying, when they had walked together to the door:

"Adieu! No. Au revoir, my child, and I hope I shall soon see you again."

"Adieu," repeated Madame Darras, and without looking back she began to descend the narrow staircase of the mean lodging. Father Euvrard stayed upon the landing a moment as though he meditated recalling her. Upon second thoughts, however, he repressed this feeling and closed the door again to return alone into his study where this unknown woman, without telling him her name, had revealed a secret drama of such poignancy. A radical difference between married people in matters of conscience is always painful; infinitely painful, when the difference touches those religious problems which have ever been and will ever continue to be the deepest concern of the soul; tragic, when the man and woman have been married before and are divorced, when they

still love one another dearly, but when awakening faith in the man or the woman brings daily remorse for their love but yet cannot destroy it. What will the other think? With what horror will he watch the slow deadly poisoning of their mutual happiness! If again it is the woman who longs for a return to the Church, whilst the man looks upon religion not merely with the indifference of the sceptic but with reasoned systematic hostility, what possibilities of conflict!

Although Madame Darras had given the Oratorian an abstract only of her sentimental life, she had said enough to show how many possibilities of misfortune menaced her home. She had long been gone and he still shuddered at the recollection. In vain the blackboard, arranged upon the easel, invited him to soar away again into the serene atmosphere of mathematical speculation. The scholar's mind was elsewhere, following the stranger on her return home and to her husband to whom she was so much attached, and yet of whom she had such dread. Why? Without doubt her husband was possessed by that hate against the Church, which, singular though it be in an age of wide intellectual culture, is yet so frequent. A victim himself of that hate, the Oratorian realised, as with a flash, the deep-lying unity that links together the destinies, diverse as they may be, of people of the same country. The inevitable shock between the husband and wife was but an episode, like his own exile from his community, of the struggle which was going on through-

out France between two schools of thought, between two civilisations, two worlds. A mere incident of a civil religious war! With such intensity did this thought embody itself in the mind of the mathematician, accustomed as he was to express long series of conceptions in the concision of a formula, that when he decided to continue the interrupted work, the murmured word which summed up his impression of the conversation was not, as a moment ago, "Poor woman!" but "Poor country," and for several seconds the chalk rested between his fingers.

CHAPTER II

A STEPFATHER

WITH how much more emotion would that aged and venerable hand have trembled, even to rendering it powerless to trace the characters of the formula,—now a matter of indifference to him,—had he possessed in a greater degree the scholar's and believer's power of unravelling the secrets of the future and the unknown. His compassion would have been even more deeply stirred, as he realised that this difference of opinion between husband and wife on religious matters,—a divergence fraught with much cause of fear to the wife,—was only one feature of the disaster which even now threatened this home, founded on a false basis. His theory of life, that an equitable scheme of retribution underlay the apparent chance events of existence, would have been immensely strengthened.

As a matter of fact, this family was about to pass through a crisis, the causes of which will reveal themselves step by step. It may, however, be stated at once, that these causes were either the direct result of the fatal system of divorce, or that the system had led to their multiplication. Madame Darras had a clear perception

of one only, that which influenced her love for her daughter and her recovered faith. The close of the afternoon was to find her in the presence of another peril, the approach of which she had foreseen for many months past. She had refused to give form in thought or word to this apprehension on her part; it remained obscure, vague, unspoken. How much truth and human experience are embodied in the saying, "Troubles never come singly"! But when it is a question of applying it in one's own case, by some strange self-deception we reason quite otherwise. "Having had one great trouble, surely we shall be spared others," say we, as if the hand of Fate had only a fixed amount of trial to mete out to each individual.

It is not so, however. Nature, a unity notwithstanding her manifold phenomena, adopts the same methods of procedure in both moral and physical development. When sickness comes, not as the result of an accident, but as the outcome of a general diathesis, the symptoms manifest themselves not in any one part of the organism, but in several. So it is with trouble, when it arises not from this or that particular circumstance, but from a condition of things. It taxes its ingenuity to attack us at the most diverse points of our personality. Trouble upon trouble crowds upon us; one vexation follows another; nothing that we undertake succeeds; every unfavourable hypothesis becomes a reality. Bad luck, fate! we say to ourselves, but let us examine matters a little

more closely and we must acknowledge that a lasting effect requires a permanent cause: the continued neglect of some great law. But what battles have to be fought before learning this lesson! What efforts we have to make to assure ourselves, even when the blow is ready to fall, that *we* shall not be struck, that it is not *our* desert, that *we* have paid our debt of sorrow and tears!

Thus had Madame Darras reasoned to herself for some months past, and relying on presumptions gained from such strange reasoning, she was able to contemplate with comparative fearlessness the shadows which were darkening the horizon of her destiny. From day to day her forebodings had increased, and yet the more persistently did she insist upon proving to herself, that among all these presages of storm,—which to her inner consciousness and unavowed faith were but the omens of a necessary expiation—only those would be fulfilled which affected her personally.

Ah! what a frail security was hers! Had she not realised how frail, when her whole being recoiled with terror as M. Euvrard, from his own knowledge, recounted the catastrophes that had overtaken women divorced from their husbands. Then, too, was there not the testimony of her own heart, as she reasoned with herself, on leaving the priest's presence? Her thoughts were less occupied with the painful disappointment of the futile step she had taken, than with the fears which a certain allusion of the priest had aroused, or rather re-

awakened. He had probed her secret dread to its very depth.

She walked on, no longer with the step of a hesitating woman, and crossed the court-yard, where the gardener-concierge was still busy setting up his picturesque grotto, and, in so doing, she was scarcely conscious of the uneasiness she had felt on her arrival here. Had he even glanced at her?

In a few minutes, she found herself in the rue Servandoni, the silence and loneliness of which were now welcome to her. With a glance around, she assured herself that her departure from the old house had not been watched. In five minutes she was in the rue Vaugirard; crossing the Luxembourg Gardens, she reached the rue Luxembourg—the one in which she lived. Having recovered from the effects of her imprudence, she lingered in the shady walks. Her thoughts ran on the conversation she had just had, and mentally she renewed it, searching into and debating the various points with M. Euvrard, as if the austere form of the priest were in reality walking by her side.

“Till we meet again!” he had said.

“Till we meet again,” had she commenced to repeat to herself as she passed through the gateway.

It will be remembered, that in his parting salutation the priest had addressed her as “My child,” a term which had particularly affected her. He could not have made use of any other, had she received from him per-

mission to participate in the rites of the Church—a permission which in her imagination she had hoped to obtain, when wending her steps to the priest's house an hour before. Again and again she had repeated to herself the words, "Until we meet again," interrogatively, though there was really no doubt in her mind. Again came the reply, which she had already given aloud, but now in a low voice, "No, no, no. I shall not go and see him again. I shall never mention this visit to Albert, never! I could not bear to see the look in his eyes, while I told him. We breakfasted together this morning. He questioned me on my plans for the day, with as much interest and gentleness as he always shows, and yet I said not a word of the step I had decided to take. I know him so well. Even if it were known to him, no word of reproach would escape his lips. But what shadows would cross his face! What sorrow in his heart! . . . No! if I had thought I was justified in revealing all to M. Euvrard, even he would have forbidden me to tell my husband. For what as a matter of fact did he say? That I could deserve grace, even outside the pale of the Church, by fulfilling my duties. What duties? Those of a mother first of all, and these I owe to my son as well as to my daughter! Well then! My duty to my son now calls me to avoid anything that would lessen in any way my influence over my husband. . . . M. Euvrard himself acknowledged that situations such as mine were productive of great difficulties.

His allusion to disastrous strife between father and stepson pained me. For a moment I almost thought I saw Albert and Lucien face to face with one another, hatred in their eyes. . . ." The image thus evoked of these two beings in an attitude of strife, agreed with so much that she as wife and mother had foreseen and observed, that instinctively she quickened her step, as if the impulse with which she put the picture away from her mind, had given her new energy.

She closed her eyes and shook her head. Again she said: "It cannot be, God cannot permit it. He has already punished me severely in allowing me to go astray from Him. The day of Jeanne's first Communion will be a bitter one for me, when it might have been so sweet. This punishment I will bear, it shall be an expiation, as the priest has just ordained. I am the only one on whom the blow shall fall;—not they! not they! That would be too cruel! What have I not suffered at the mere thought that these two loved each other less, and how repeatedly has this thought occurred to me this year! It was, of course, mere imagination. . . . Yet how strangely is one tempted to make realities of the things we dread. Those few words of M. Euvrard were sufficient, in a second, to bring back all the agony of these forebodings. If I had interrupted him at that moment to reveal my fears to him, would he not have counselled me to do everything in my power to make their love for me a connecting link between them, should

a day come when they were seriously at variance with one another? At variance! What a fancy! At variance in what? They are of one mind in religion, in politics, in everything. I have allowed Albert almost too much freedom to educate this child on his own lines. . . . Could I have acted otherwise? Have I done wrong? I thought as they did, or I thought I did. I was sincere, God knows. He cannot punish me for that. My trouble is surely already great enough. Wives whose sins have been greater than mine have obtained what has not been granted me. Those who have had lovers go to Confession, and take the Communion, whilst I cannot. Is this just? . . . But I will argue no longer. I will obey M. Euvrard on this point;—be resigned, take this trouble, and thank God for it, in the hope that other worse ones will not overtake me. . . . Yet when I think that there are families where only one faith exists;—where mother, father, brother, and sister kneel together in evening prayer; go to church in company. . . . And I, I must not speak to my husband of this harmless visit, and if I now met my son, and he asked me where I had been, and I told him, he would not even understand me! When Jeanne sees the mothers of the other girls communicating, and not her own,—the fathers at church, but not hers, I must invent some falsehood so that her poor little heart does not grieve! M. Euvrard is only too right in saying, What wretchedness! What misery!”

These thoughts were the residue, so to speak, of the impressions many and small which had filtered through her mind. So insignificant were they, that Madame Darras could scarcely specify when these doubts as to the good understanding between her husband and son took form. In fact, she almost felt they existed only in her imagination. No more could she tell the exact point of time when the religious belief of her youth had been fanned again into flame by the warmth of her child's faith. These thoughts summed up and gathered together numberless incidents of her own private life. So absorbed did she become in them that she was quite oblivious of her surroundings, and unconscious of her actions. She had walked into the Gardens, unaware of how she got there; she left them in the same unconscious state of mind, and when she found herself at her door in the rue du Luxembourg, she started as when one wakes and is delivered from the oppression of a nightmare. Was not this house the embodiment of long years of happiness, which suddenly rose up before her? It had been built by Albert Darras at the time of their marriage, according to plans thought out together. He passionately desired to wipe out his wife's past, and she as ardently wished her second home to have a character of its own, and therefore it was their mutual wish to have a dwelling belonging only to themselves, and which they would never quit until death called them away. They had selected a neighbourhood far removed from

the Champs Elysées, the quarter in which she had formerly lived. Gabrielle had clearly realised that her new life meant an entire break with her former surroundings. She herself had longed for a life of quiet retirement, but to this her husband had not consented. The poor student of the École Polytechnique who had not dared to aspire to the hand of Mlle. Nouet—Madame Darras' maiden name—was now consulting engineer in one of the most important Paris Banks, the *Grand-Comptoir*, and enjoyed a yearly income of £800; his share of the profits was worth another £1200; his wife had in her own right some £1600; their income was thus large enough to justify their taking a good position in society, as Darras had wished. The elegant frontage of the house, with its carriage entrance and the lofty windows of the ground floor, revealed what plans of entertaining on a large scale the engineer had formed. Strangely complex motives had prompted him to adopt this course of life, so opposed as it seemed to his character and bringing up. He loved Gabrielle and was proud of her beauty. That was one motive. Another was to be found in the fervour of his political attachments. His allegiance had been given to the party then in power, and he was anxious that both he and his wife should play their part among the more distinguished members of the Republican party.

It is a matter of knowledge, that in the course of the last thirty years Society has thus been reformed from the

ranks of the well-to-do middle class and those holding high official positions. They have often been reproached with adopting the same frivolous habits of life as Society under former governments; with manifesting the same taste for pleasure, the same extravagance. As if this display of luxury, this keeping up of "Salons" on the part of the Jacobin "hostages," was not often a mere matter of duty! We are speaking here of course of the simple and honest-minded members of a party in itself corrupt and degraded in the last degree. They thought they could bestow on the new order of things the prestige of an old-established system. Darras had shared this opinion with the greater willingness, as in so doing, a secret feud was established between the two sections of society in which Gabrielle had passed her former life, the one being that of the law and magistracy—M. Nouet at the time of his death was one of the judges of the Appeal Court—the other that of the County gentry, as Madame Darras' first husband, of whose coarse brutality she had spoken with so much repugnance to M. Euvrard, belonged indubitably to a good, but impoverished, family of Rouergue, that of the Comtes de Chambault.

On Darras, a son of the people, inheriting from them his stern temperament and indomitable will, these diverse influences manifested themselves in an untiring effort to add to his fortune. It was all done to acquire luxury and comfort for Gabrielle. His tireless devotion, so prodigal in its little acts of attention and

tenderest solicitude, stirred the heart of her, who had ever been its most constant object, as she crossed the threshold of her home. Her wifely feelings resumed the first place in her heart. There was a recoil of her whole being towards the close intercourse of home life, to which in her visit to the priest and her own subsequent musings she had been unfaithful. As she thought of her regained happiness, she rebelled again, as she had done before, at the inflexibility of the law of the Roman Catholic Church.

"No," she said, "it is not possible. It cannot be true. God would not be God, if He condemns us, Albert and myself, for having loved one another as we have done. I have just passed through a nightmare. I will not see this priest again. With his gentle manners, and good-natured face, he is worse than the other. If the Church is such as they make it, then it cannot be the Church of the New Testament. No! I have not done wrong. No! a love so faithful and constant is not accursed. I will lose myself in it,—live in it entirely. It shall be, as it has been so long, all I want. It shall. . . ."

Scarcely had she uttered these decisive words, than an impression, produced by an insignificant circumstance, showed her how incapable of firm resolution she was in her overwrought state. She had barely opened the door and entered the hall, when she caught sight of her husband's coat, hat, and gloves carefully placed on the

table, with the fastidiousness he displayed in all his actions. He had left the house at one o'clock after lunching with her, had gone to his office, which he never left before five. Now it was only half-past three. In the confusion of her thoughts, Gabrielle had not anticipated being brought face to face with Albert, her whole being trembling with an emotion she must hide at all costs, and without having the time to recover herself. It never occurred to her to ask the cause of this unexpected return. The thought that in a moment perhaps she would meet her husband's gaze, that she would be questioned as to how she had spent the early part of the afternoon, so upset her, that there was a slight tremor in her voice as she said to the man-servant:

"Has your master been in long?"

"Ten minutes, Madame," he replied.

"Supposing, after all, he had seen me leave the rue Servandoni? . . . Supposing he had overtaken and questioned me, what could I have answered? What shall I say to him, if he notices my disquietude? If he does see, how shall I explain it, without arousing his distrust? He will see by my eyes that I am not speaking the truth. . . ."

In this home, where for so many years the intimacy between husband and wife had been so close, it was the habit of whichever came in last to seek the other at once.

The first floor of the house, reserved for these two,

was so arranged that they could not help hearing one another moving about. It consisted of five rooms;—a spacious bedroom, with large dressing-room for Gabrielle; Albert's own dressing-room, arranged so that it could be transformed into a sleeping apartment if necessary; a small salon and next to it a library and smoking-room combined. This was the room he used when he was alone.

The main staircase, of wood, was carpeted, and adorned with plants, and led up to a wide landing, arranged as an anteroom, on to which the various rooms opened. Here it was, that Gabrielle stood, with beating heart. . . . Albert was in there somewhere. Perhaps he had already guessed she was in, by the ring of the bell. He would come to greet her. . . . Then, as the door did not open, she took advantage of this respite, to regain possession of herself, before meeting her husband. The thought struck her that she would first go to the children's quarters on the second floor, and see her daughter, who, no doubt, would be busy with her lessons in the schoolroom.

Gabrielle had persuaded her husband to allow Jeanne to be educated at home under the care of a governess, rather than send her to a high school for girls, as had been his wish. He had merely claimed that her course of study should be that followed at the High School. A professor of one of the large colleges situated on the left bank of the Seine, gave her a lesson every week with the

class of her own standard. The interference of the ardent freethinker in this question of education only went so far, and did not touch essential points, which he had promised to leave to his wife. He was seldom seen in the schoolroom. Therefore when Gabrielle reached the second floor she was greatly astonished at hearing her husband's voice inside this room. He had been prompted in the same way, on his return, to go up and see his daughter. Instead of retarding the time of meeting, as she thought, she had hastened it on. But to meet in the presence of their child, gave her at once an opportunity of general conversation, and thus her anxiety was removed as to what her first words should be, and the revelations that might ensue. Moreover, she had another cause for disquietude, which at once laid the other to rest. She remembered that on this day of the week, Friday, it was Jeanne's task to write out an analysis of the catechism lesson she had had the evening before. What motive had led Albert to come to the schoolroom especially to-day?

Without knocking, she opened the door and there saw her husband, holding in his hands the sheet of paper, upon which Jeanne had begun to write. The light, coming through the bay window, fell on the faces of father and child, one against the other. The mother stopped, struck for the moment at the resemblance between them, which was not always so striking. The nervous temperament of the little girl betrayed itself in

the instinctive way in which her mobile features had caught her father's expression, so strong was the emotion his unexpected visit had called forth.

The engineer was a man of forty-seven. Although his short-cut hair was quite white, his black moustache testified to the dark complexion of his youthful days. The modelling of his somewhat angular face indicated a strongly developed bone-structure, a characteristic of mountain races, while the subdued fire in his eyes, the lean sparseness of his form, and the uniformly even colouring of his complexion, bespoke a Southern origin. There was something of the Arab in the cast of the face, in the supple form, and the small, well-made hands and feet. The Darras family originally came from Sisteron. This old fortified town lies far distant from the sea, but Provence,—as is proved by the name of one of her mountain chains, *Les Maures*,—has been the scene of so many Saracen incursions, that everywhere one meets with types of face that only require the turban and the cloak to bring out the Bedouin latent in the civilised Frenchman.

This atavism was perhaps as much verified in Albert's unbelief as in his features, his lack of faith being a reversal of the religious fervour of the fanatic. Perhaps also, he had inherited the fiery nature of an ancestor who had taken part in the Wars of the League, which were terrible in this out-of-the-way corner of France. Such suppositions are so far-fetched, that one hardly

likes to utter them. They, nevertheless, influence our sub-conscious life,—that most mysterious and potent part of our nature. Jeanne had the same passionate eyes and bluish-black hair. The northern blood of her mother,—the Nouets were a middle-class family of Perche,—glowed under her transparent skin, and when excited by emotion, brought the crimson to her cheeks. She was exerting all her strength to hide the confusion betrayed by the fluttering of her long-lashed eyelids. Her father, with the alert finger of the student, was following, line by line, the little girl's task, and at the same time uttering criticisms, the nature of which ought to have reassured Gabrielle, as they dealt only with points of ordinary interest.

“You must be careful not to make your *u* like *n*, and your *n* like *u*. Look here, for instance, in the words, *absolution* and *supernatural*, it is difficult to distinguish the two letters. Isn't it so, Fräulein?”

He handed the copy to a lady, who was standing behind Jeanne. Her heavy, square-shaped head, her fair hair, blue eyes, and mild expression, bespoke German origin. Mlle. Mina Schultze, evidently as nervous as her pupil, replied to this remark of the father, with the well-known, indescribable accent:

“It is because Jeanne writes so much German, M. Darras, and you know our *u* resembles our *n*. . . .”

The entrance of Gabrielle at once brought a bright relief into the faces of the governess and the little girl.

Her husband was unable to conceal a slight confusion. It was repugnant to him, a man as loyal as he was rigid in his unbelief, to appear as if he were enquiring into the religious instruction with which he had promised not to interfere. The words with which he greeted the new arrival were chosen as if to ward off this suspicion.

"I came upstairs to enquire of Jeanne, if she knew when you would be returning. . . ."

"And I told Papa," said the little girl, "that you would not be very late, as you had allowed Mademoiselle and me to use the carriage." She was precocious enough to know that she must play her part in the explanation her father had furnished for his unusual visit. Her father patted her cheek, as if by so doing, he were thanking her for her help. Prompted by a sentiment no less natural, and to show that she had nothing to conceal with regard to the instruction being given to her daughter, his wife replied:

"You have taken this opportunity of looking over her work a little. I am very glad. You will no doubt see that she has made progress in composition."

"Oh! yes," he replied drily. "Now that you have returned, my dear, we will leave her to go on with her work. I have already kept her more than a quarter of an hour from it. It is too long. . . ."

"Oh! I have plenty of time!" exclaimed Jeanne. "I know all my lessons. . . ."

"When it is a question of preparing her *duty*,"

persisted the governess, "she hurries on with the others, so as to give herself more time for this. It is the work she likes best. . . ."

The tactless Fräulein kissed the little girl, while thus praising her. She did not notice that her remark with regard to the religious tendency of her pupil's mind, had brought a shadow to the father's face and a look of anguish to the mother's. Neither of them replied, but scarcely had they left the room, on their way down the stairs that led to their apartments, than her husband took advantage of this imprudent remark. The use of the ecclesiastical term sometimes employed for *catechism*, had irritated him again. He had experienced the feeling, always full of sorrow to him, of the presence of another world, far removed from his own, but in which honour compelled him to allow his daughter to grow up.

"You noticed," he began, reverting again to the justification he had previously put forth, "I made no remark to Jeanne on the subject of her work. . . . And yet! . . . But I have given you my promise, and a promise once given cannot be broken—there's an end of the matter—it must be kept. . . . But I still think I was right in my objections when you sought my promise, before our marriage. Religious observances seem useful as a means of ensuring moral habits; one accepts them as a matter of routine, because, by so doing, one avoids difficulties which would arise when it comes to marrying a girl brought up outside Church in-

fluence. At first, one does not realise the drawbacks to such a compromise. . . . And then one finds one has risked developing a tendency to mysticism in an over-sensitive temperament. You heard what Mlle. Schultze said. You see how the religious sensibilities of the child are already gaining strength. . . . I am not reproaching you, but would like you to be watchful. Do not let her go too far in this direction. Warn Mlle. Schultze. In choosing a German governess for Jeanne, it would have been wiser to have taken a Protestant. There would have been a counterbalancing influence. . . . But, once more, do not think I am reproaching you. Think only of the future, and the struggles we should have to go through if, thinking as we ourselves do now, Jeanne's religious sentiments carry her so far as to bring her into opposition to us."

"Mlle. Schultze exaggerates . . ." replied Gabrielle. Her heart beat, as Albert used the word "ourselves." The ambiguity which had existed in their domestic relations for some time past, was summed up in that word. How often lately had he spoken to her in this strain! The fear of an immediate discussion had always paralysed her, and she had no word to say in reply. She remained silent, or turned the conversation into other channels, as she now did once more.

"Jeanne doesn't take more pains with this lesson than she does with others," she continued, "but it is the only one she has in company with young girls she

knows. The feeling of emulation is roused. . . .” Generally when Gabrielle employed such subterfuges in order to escape a real discussion, she felt that mixture of relief and shame so common to reserved and timid natures. Now, however, her visit to Père Euvrard was too fresh in her memory, and the words of the Apostle he had quoted, “*Confess with thy mouth the faith that is in thy heart*” . . . suddenly flashed through her mind. Remorse seized her, to be quickly followed by a start of terrified surprise, as she listened to Albert’s reply.

“You are right, you are able to follow Jeanne’s development more closely than I can. Moreover, whether there is a foundation or not for my fears for the future on this point, is beside the question. I have to speak to you about very important matters which concern the present. You must be as courageous as you can, dear one. The reason of my unusually early return, and of my desire to see you as soon as possible, is that a very serious situation has arisen. Feeling it right that you should know of it as soon as possible, I came to tell you of it myself. I have just had a violent interview with Lucien at my office.”

“With Lucien?” repeated the mother. They were now in Albert’s study. She dropped into an easy-chair, trembling from head to foot. It was a mere chance coincidence that this, the greatest of all difficulties, should have presented itself just then, so soon after her

interview in the rue Servandoni, and the reflections it had called forth. But how could she fail to discern in it the prelude to that expiation which she had so ardently desired to avert? And if she were wrong in looking upon this event as the special manifestation of an individual will, whereas it was merely "the logic of life" (to quote the formula of the priest-mathematician), had she not reason to tremble at this sudden intervention of the inevitable and mysterious power which produces from every cause an effect, and whose punishment for our every fault is the outcome of the fault itself?

"Yes, with Lucien," replied Albert. By nature, habit, and discipline, he had complete mastery of his feelings, but at this moment he found great difficulty in overcoming his agitation. Instead of seating himself by his wife's side, and trying to calm her agitated feelings with helpful words, as he would have done under other circumstances, he paced up and down the room, without even giving her a look. He was completely lost in his own thoughts.

The only two passions which this student of the Polytechnique had ever known—his wife and his intellectual aspirations,—were revealed in the decoration of this room. The walls were covered with his books, and the sole work of art that found a place here, was the full-length portrait of his wife by Maxime Fauriel, the insipid but elegant painter of Republican high life, whether Whig or Radical. Order in the minutest details

reigned on shelves and writing table. The father's accusation against the stepson wore a more authoritative form in this familiar setting of objects, all of which bore the stamp of an inflexibly rigid character, exact in the smallest as well as in the greatest things. Even in this acute crisis the need for precision was felt by Darras, and he did his best to give his explanation in a clear and methodical manner.

"In order to thoroughly understand the situation," he continued, "in all its bearings, I must acquaint you with a fact, of which, I hoped I should never have to speak to you. . . ."

Gabrielle started with surprise.

"You will soon understand why," he said. "When you consented to marry me, I well knew how much you had suffered. I vowed to myself that I would do all in my power to make up for that, and you know my ruling principle is, 'At all costs to keep a promise once made.' It is our religion, the religion of those who are supposed to have none, the noblest, the truest of religions, that of the conscience. You had a son. I made up my mind to always act towards this boy as if he were my own. This I have done. I can claim no special merit for it. I should have loved this child for no other reason than that he was yours. I have also loved him for himself. If, as I profoundly believe, a man's convictions are in reality the man himself, I can regard him as my own son. It is I who have formed his opinions, fashioned

his thought and belief, moulded his will. . . . At any rate, I thought I had . . .” he corrected himself with studied bitterness. “I have said all this in order to show you how it was, that, brought face to face with the necessity of deciding a serious question then and there, I said nothing to you about it. I asked myself how a real father would have acted under the circumstances. I recognised the fact that I had undertaken the responsibilities, as well as the duties, of fatherhood. Knowing your tenderness of heart, I wished to spare you the pain of any part in a struggle, of which, I confess, I could not foresee the result. Forgive me, my dear wife, for having kept this from you. It is the first secret I have not shared with you. I so feared that participation in this trouble would recall many very sad memories! . . . I have often said to you, and still think, that man is what education makes him. The belief in an all-powerful heredity is but a remnant of that vast system of organised injustice, the Church. . . . This belief is so deeply rooted, that even the most reasonable minds are contaminated by it. Thus I, too, have been troubled to find certain moral resemblances in Lucien. I had seen you terribly oppressed by this fear. I wished to save you from a recurrence of such an experience. . . . Do you now understand my motive, and will you forgive me? . . .”

“I see in it a proof of your love for me, and I quite appreciate your kind thoughtfulness,” replied Gabrielle.

The reference to her first husband had made her shudder. Entreatingly she continued, "I dread what you have to tell me. . . . What has happened? What has Lucien done? Tell me quickly. . . ."

"You are very much upset, dearest Gabrielle," said Albert. "It is just the result I feared. Try and take it quietly. We have to face a serious difficulty, a very serious one,—requiring careful consideration. Be calm and look at the facts of the case. The cause of the scene which has just taken place between Lucien and myself," he continued after an interval of silence, "dates back to the summer of last year. It was then, you will remember, Lucien was not so regular in returning home to his meals. This troubled you. I tried to allay your fears. I reminded you of his age, pointed out to you that many of the young men he met at the Sciences politiques and the École de droit, were absolutely free from all restraint. In comparing their independence and his own dependence, softened by affection though it might be, there was a risk of his being drawn away from us. I quite believed all I told you, but I did not tell you all I thought. These absences, which became more and more frequent, troubled me quite as much as yourself, especially as they were accompanied by a change in his manner. I noticed that he was no longer interested in what concerned us, you or me, or his sister. We certainly had his bodily presence, but his thoughts were elsewhere. I had no doubt whatever as to the

cause of this. It is only a woman's influence that can thus transform a young man, and so quickly."

"You think he is in love?" asked the mother. A look of relief, unnoticed by Darras, overspread her anxious face. That the misunderstanding between her husband and son should have arisen on account of a lapse of this kind on her son's part, was only a cause of annoyance. The purest-minded women are secretly indulgent to faults of this nature. What Gabrielle most dreaded were the conflicts arising out of the relationship established by her second marriage. She added: "I too drew my own conclusions as to the meaning of these absences, which did not pass unnoticed by me. . . ." Then with some hesitancy, she said, "I dreaded another influence. . . . I feared that he was frequently seeing M. de Chambault."

"He would not do that for your sake . . ." he replied eagerly. "At any rate, I have no misgivings on this point. I am now reaping the benefit of the openness with which I put our position before him, when he was sixteen years of age. He read the case and judgment relating to the separation. He is armed against that influence, in that he admits, what I scarcely think is probable, that there is a possibility of its being exercised. But why should it be now? . . . No! He is in love, and with a woman whom we have every reason to fear, do you follow me, every reason. . . . But I resume my narrative of the facts. Noticing the change in

him, and suspecting the cause, I tried to question him on his frequent absences,—of course without any upbraiding on my part—about the friends he visited, and the way in which his evenings were spent. I found him reserved, touchy; his heart closed to me. This recoil from my affectionate interest left no doubt in my mind. He knows what my principles are, and that I do not admit the truth of the saying, ‘A young man must sow his wild oats.’ This trifling with conscience is the disgrace of Catholic countries, due to the easy accommodation of the Confessional. But, if the human body is looked upon as sacred, debauchery is regarded with horror as selfish and degrading. It is two years since we touched on this point, at the time when Lucien entered upon his military service. I was delighted to find that his opinions coincided with mine, and they underwent no change while he was away. The horrible atmosphere of barrack-life had not spoiled him. He was so frank with me then, and revealed the secrets of his heart so openly! From the day I lost his confidence I knew very well that he was keeping back a secret of which he was ashamed. I concluded, therefore, that he had given way to temptation, as so many others have done. . . .”

“It was then that you should have told me,” said Gabrielle. The few words he had spoken against the Confessional had brought a protest to her lips, and the resentment she dared not utter found vent in this reproach, as also the love she had for both

these men, whose antagonism was to cause her so much suffering.

"A son," she continued, "will often tell his mother what he withholds from his father. To me he would have spoken. There would have been no shock between your characters. Ah! Albert, you thought you were sparing me anxiety and sorrow. There can be nothing worse than to know that angry words have passed between you and him."

"It would not have altered matters at all," replied Darras, "and your suffering would only have come sooner. . . . Besides, my suppositions were only founded on reasonings unsupported by fact. You say, Lucien would have told you. I do not think he would. You would have found yourself confronted by a stubborn resolution of which I had the explanation to-day. No, this person has completely conquered him, and he would have withheld his secret, even from you. It was quite by chance that I got on the track. It is eight months since I first suspected this intrigue, but I have only had positive proofs for the last six weeks. It was during the second fortnight in January, on the day I dined with Huard. You will remember I started in good time, so as to get a little walk. I took the longest way round, passing by the Odéon to have a look at the new books. I turned into the rue Racine, and walked slowly in the direction of the rue Thénard, where my friend lives. I knew his work at the Polytechnique did not finish before

midday. I had therefore plenty of time. . . . All at once, a young man, whom I recognised as Lucien, approached on the opposite side of the road, accompanied by a young woman. He was so completely lost in his conversation with her, that he did not notice me. They both stopped before the door of a creamery, which existed there even in my time. They seemed as if they were about to separate. The woman opened the door, and evidently invited him to come in too. Lucien looked at his watch, then shrugging his shoulders, entered.

“I was undecided whether to retrace my steps or not, as I wished to avoid any appearance of having followed him. After a little reflection I crossed the road, and standing before the restaurant looked through the window. Lucien and his companion were seated side by side at the corner of a table. They were unfolding their napkins, talking at the same time. If I had had any uncertainty in my mind as to the cause of the change in him, there was no doubt about it now. His countenance expressed only too well the intensity of his feelings towards her. His eyes never left her face. I could only see his profile, but had a full view of her. I could distinguish the smallest details of her features. I should be unjust to her if I did not acknowledge that she had the appearance of being a thoroughly virtuous girl. Her dress of steel-grey cloth was simply made and scrupulously neat and clean. She had hung up her hat.

Her chestnut hair was brushed up high above her forehead, and tied behind in a short, broad plait, such as is worn by schoolgirls, although she must be twenty-five, if not more. She is slight, rather short, and has finely cut features, almost too small, with dark brown eyes, and a pale complexion. She looked casually in my direction for a moment. She saw that I was looking at her, but was not in the least disconcerted. She looked at me with complete indifference, although without a vestige of boldness in her look. Under her gaze, I dropped my eyes, turned, and walked away. I dreaded lest she should call Lucien's attention to me, and, although the meeting was entirely accidental, I could not bear the idea that he should find me acting what, to all appearances, seemed the part of a spy."

"You a spy on him!" exclaimed Gabrielle, "have you not all a father's authority? You acknowledged this yourself a few minutes ago. When a father wishes to find out what friendships his son has made, it is no longer a question of espionage, but supervision."

"I did say to you that I looked upon him as my son," he said, correcting her. "But 'truth must be faced,' says one of my favourite mottoes. He . . ." Then he continued, with evident effort: "Alas! he does not look upon me as a father. He was already a big boy when we were married. His childish hostility made you forget your own uneasiness. What tact it required on my part to overcome his prejudices! I succeeded, but I could not

hide from myself the fact that the work accomplished was superficial, and would have no lasting effect. To-day's experience has shown me how correct I was in my judgment."

"My dear one!" said Gabrielle, clasping her hands. "How dearly we have already paid for our happiness! . . ."

Her husband could not grasp the true meaning of this gesture and exclamation—the instinctive expression of prayer, outcome of the superstitious terror which had been gaining strength since the conversation began. His thoughts were still occupied with the details of his story, which he now continued.

"For this reason I made no attempt to break his silence when I had nothing to go upon but mere suspicion. Now, and after what I had seen, I felt more sure of my ground. The sight of this young woman's face had left me ill at ease. She was not the common Quartier Latin girl whose presence might indicate only a degrading, but passing adventure. . . . In short, I determined to make full enquiries, a duty which I considered I owed to you as your husband. Yes, as your husband. You know very well I am one of those who appreciate the seriousness of the form of Civil Marriage. It has more solemnity for me than all the empty show of the Church service. The husband should be his wife's protector—physically and morally. It is my duty to defend you against the moral danger which might

threaten you in your son. Every duty presupposes the right of carrying it out. I was therefore justified in employing all honest means within my power to find out the truth in the first place. Since Lucien showed himself openly with this woman, others, besides myself, must have met them. His friendship for her must certainly be known by his fellow-students. I determined to know exactly how matters stood, and without further delay resolved to speak to Huard, whose son is also studying law. Relying on a friendship of thirty years' standing, formed even before college days, I felt sure he would do for me what I would have done for him under like circumstances.—When we were alone after dinner, I told him my anxieties and asked him to question his boy frankly on the matter. He promised to do so the same day. What he was able to tell me was not very exact, but such as it was, it is important. You may judge for yourself.

“Ernest Huard was very reluctant to speak about Lucien, which shows how serious the situation is, and—you will be as much astonished as I was to hear it,—excused his seeming ignorance of matters, by saying that Lucien spent all his mornings at the hospitals, his afternoons at the Medical School or at the Museum, and scarcely ever came to the Law School. Meeting one another one day, Ernest expressed his surprise, when Lucien informed him of his intention of changing his career, and becoming a doctor.”

"A doctor? . . ." repeated the mother. "And he never said a word to us about it! What folly! With his fortune, and the support of friends, a fine career awaits him without any difficulty at the Foreign Office. Bouteiller is only waiting for Lucien to pass his examination to find him a place in his Embassy. Doctor! That means beginning his studies all over again! Besides I cannot understand what connection there is between this madness and this woman who is causing you such anxiety! . . ."

"I am coming to that point," replied Darras. "Like you, I could not at first sight unravel the threads of connection between this strange freak, and the passion which I thought had gained the mastery over him. The fact, however, of his having undertaken these medical studies without giving us the least notion that he was doing so, made me at once suspect that his companion of the restaurant was no stranger to his movements. . . . Before making further indirect enquiries, I resolved to watch myself this creamery in the rue Racine at the hour when I had first seen them enter it. I found that when Lucien absented himself from his lunch here every other day, he was always to be found there with the stranger. They occupied the same corner of the table, which was evidently reserved for them. They lunched there, side by side, as I had seen them doing the first time, or rather, it was she who lunched. Prudence only allowed hurried and superficial observation, but even so, I could

see that her presence was all he needed. His behaviour was exactly the same as before. He scarcely touched the dishes put before him. All he did was to gaze at her, and how much was conveyed in that look! When I was convinced that they were both habitués of the place, I resolved to go in myself during their absence. I questioned the waiter who brought them their meals. He had no objection whatever to replying. In this way, I learned that the young girl was a medical student and her name Mlle. Planat. The mystery was solved. The attendances at the hospital could be explained in two ways. Either they furnished Lucien with a pretext for constant intercourse with this girl, with whom he was in love, or he seriously thinks of preparing himself for the medical profession, a course which you have just qualified as madness, or there may be something worse. Lately there have been several cases of marriage between men and women students, who, having passed their examinations, settle down and carry on their profession together. . . .”

“This girl wants to be married? . . .” interrupted Gabrielle, and she seized her husband’s hand, as if seeking for support. “Do not hide anything from me,” she said. “You spoke to Lucien about her? Did he say that? . . .”

“As a matter of fact, I did speak to Lucien about this girl,” replied Darras, as he freed himself from her grasp. He wished to retain his composure for what he still had

to say. "Now, be calm. If the idea of this marriage ever occurred to him, it is no longer in his thoughts. I had at once the same idea as yourself, and it was enough to show me that I could not let matters rest. Mind you, I should not have any rooted objection to Lucien's adopting another career than the one we had mapped out for him, if I were sure that in so doing he were following the dictates of his mind and inclination. Nor should I have any objection to his marrying a young girl who had taken her degrees in law or medicine, if she were a virtuous girl, and I were certain she were such. Equality between the sexes seems to me right in principle. I have no doubt in the future the number of women-lawyers and women-doctors will increase largely. I am informed on very good authority that this is already the case. Mlle. Planat might possibly belong to that section of pure-minded, earnest women-students who are preparing to earn their own living, and who by their irreproachable behaviour have gained the respect of their fellow-students. On the other hand, she might be a designing woman. Lucien will be rich. He is unsuspecting and generous. What a prey, ready to hand, for an adventureress!

"We have at the *Grand-Comptoir* two old confidential enquiry agents, who are specially set apart for secret investigation. Sometimes a suspected clerk has to be watched, sometimes we must be assured of the probity of a capitalist who wishes to open an account with us,

sometimes . . . but there is no need to go into these details. The chief point is that the information they have procured has always proved thoroughly reliable. After thinking a little, I decided to set one of them to work. In a fortnight's time he had gained the following information about Mlle. Planat, or Bertha Planat, to give her her full name. This girl is twenty-six years of age, that is to say, three years older than Lucien. She has neither father nor mother. Her father was a Captain in the Infantry. The Planats are a middle-class family of Thiers in Puy-de-Dôme. Bertha lost both her parents when she was very young. She has been brought up by an old uncle, late Registrar at Clermont-Ferrand. She passed her examinations at the College in that town. Immediately after this success she came to Paris, under the pretext of studying there, not medicine, but law. As a matter of fact she lived for several months, as wife, with a young man whom she had known at Clermont, named Étienne Méjan. This Méjan is an eccentric individual, a product of the literary clubs of the Quartier Latin. He scribbles, recites poetry, and lectures. At that time he too was known to be studying law. By this Méjan Bertha had a child, a boy, who, after the separation, was left in her care, and put out to nurse at Moret, near Fontainebleau. The approach of the birth of her child had interrupted her studies, but probably not before it was well known what was about to happen to her. Moreover, she herself at this time

made no secret of their relationship. She went to live with Méjan again. Her lover's friends knew her. Was it in order to change her *milieu*, or for mere fancy that, after the birth of the child, she left the law to study medicine? She seems to have been successful in her new studies. She passed several examinations creditably, and her teachers thought well of her. Four years have passed between this connection with Méjan and her first meeting with Lucien. Has she had any similar adventures? . . . Pretty as she is, independent, free from scruples, and with a past like hers, it is very likely. At the same time, my informant was not able to bring anything to light on this point. Of Lucien's love for her, on the other hand, there cannot be a shadow of doubt in the minds of those who know them, slight as that knowledge is, for the two lovers avoid their fellow-students as much as they can. No day passes without their seeing each other. She allows him to visit her at her home in the rue Rollin, No. 24. They frequent the same Lecture Hall. They take their walks together. They have meals in common. If he had not us to consider, I am sure he would live entirely with her, as the other one did. . . ."

"Lucien, so proud, so refined! Is it really possible? . . ." groaned his mother. "And he is not ashamed to come and kiss me, to kiss his sister, just after he has been to see this girl! Yet, you wish me not to put any faith in heredity. . . . Trained as he has been,

with your example and your sympathy, even the very thought of this Méjan, ought to have made him shrink with horror, if . . .”

“He knows nothing of this . . .” interrupted Albert. Once more the eagerness with which he replied was an indication that in the midst of this grave discussion his wife had unwittingly touched on a tender point. He insisted;—“No, he knows nothing. Does not her very hypocrisy condemn her? Though living in the Quartier Latin, she has been able to gloss over the story of her past. It is I, you see, it is I, who first brought to Lucien’s ears the name of Méjan and told of his *liaison* with Mlle. Planat,—the birth of the child,—in fact everything. It was in the first misguided impulse of his indignation against this shame, so unexpectedly disclosed, that he uttered words to me which I never dreamed of hearing from his lips. However, I prefer it should be so. Yes! I would rather he felt passionately than basely. Never for a moment did I anticipate that he would do otherwise. When I knew the truth about Bertha Planat, I was sure that Lucien was in ignorance of everything. The more reason therefore was there to act quickly and free him as soon as possible from this dangerous intimacy. One would have thought the mere statement of the truth ought to have sufficed for this. I decided, therefore, to speak openly to Lucien and to have a thorough understanding with him. I realised that if he was actually ignorant of everything, I was, so to

speak, about to perform a surgical operation, and, by inflicting pain, heal the afflicted one of his disease. Wisdom and pity suggested a remedy close at hand. There is only one for infatuations of this nature,—absence. Lucien must leave Paris for a time. By a lucky chance I heard lately that one of my colleagues will shortly be going away for some time. He feels overdone, and has asked leave of absence. The Board are going to send him on a tour round the world, through America, Japan, East India, and Egypt. He will take the opportunity of inspecting our branches in those parts of the world. He would like to have some one with him to be a companion, rather than a secretary. This was an exceptional chance. I spoke to Delaître about Lucien. He was delighted with my proposal. It only remained to speak to Lucien himself. Before mentioning Mlle. Planat's name, I thought it advisable to suggest that he should avail himself of this opportunity. If, tempted by this chance, he accepted my offer, I should conclude he was not so deeply affected as I supposed. In this way, his absence would be certain, and the work of disillusionment would be accomplished without recourse to painful means. If he refused, I should at once have a pretext for enquiring into this refusal. I should then tell him what I knew of his conduct and the rest. . . . Well, I did do this. I purposely met him this morning as he was preparing to go out. I asked him to come to my office about half-past one to talk over a very important matter.

I saw that he was surprised at the place of meeting. I explained that I should be fully occupied all the morning, and would only be at liberty for a quarter of an hour, and I wished the talk to be entirely between ourselves. My real reason was that my office was next-door to Delaître's. I wanted to take advantage of this fact, so as to introduce them to one another, and that the definite engagement could be made in each other's presence. Lucien was not taken in by my reasons. By his eyes, I saw he knew that his secret had been guessed. Once more, he did not return to lunch. From that I concluded he had gone to the rue Racine to talk matters over with his accomplice. . . . When I reached my office, I found that he had got there before me. The tone of the conversation was that which we have adopted towards each other for the last year,—deferential but cautious on his part, affectionate but prudent on mine. From the moment I used the word 'voyage,' I was conscious of a change in his demeanour. His voice became sharp and his manner nervous. He flatly refused. His refusal was abrupt, but still polite. . . . I then told him all it was my duty to tell him. He now knows as much about Mlle. Planat as you do. . . . Do not ask how this misguided child received the revelation I had to make, or in what way he replied to me. Never before in my existence have I passed through such cruel moments. But I am not angry with him, I am anxious to tell you at once. . . . I shall never bear him ill-will,

no matter what he does. He is your son. . . . Besides, if he so far forgot himself as to be disrespectful to me, your husband, to the one who has cared for his welfare, and who loves him so much, it is because he was no longer himself. For this one hour at least he was really not responsible for his actions. He stood there before me like a madman, contending against the facts I had given him. He knows how incapable I am of lying to him, of accusing any one without proof. Yes, he was mad with vexation, astonishment, and anger. What an actress this woman must be to have taken such advantage of him! . . . How I pitied him! Upon my word of honour, I assure you during the whole of the lamentable scene, my heart was full of pity for him. And now, I pity him more than ever. To think that he also has gone to find proofs. Proofs of what? The innocence of this poor unfortunate creature. Proofs? I mentioned Méjan. I told him where the child was. . . . He will find only too many of these proofs, and instead of his returning to extort a pardon from me, as he threatened he would do, under pain of our never seeing him again, he will return to ask my forgiveness. But what a state of mind he will be in, poor child! . . .”

“It is I, his mother, who must first ask you to forgive her son . . .” exclaimed Madame Darras, passionately embracing her husband. “He has insulted you! He has threatened you, my dear one, my beloved! . . . You are right. He is to be pitied. When he is convinced of the

truth of what you have told him, how terribly he will suffer! Ah! how well you know him! Yes! he will return. He will want to speak to you, but will not dare to do so. You will let me see him first and tell him that you still love him, even after his behaviour. . . .”

She sobbed aloud, and drawing herself closer to her husband, she murmured: “Oh! Do not be angry with me. . . . I ought to judge him very severely! . . . but he is my son, my only son! . . .”

“My dearest!” said Darras, taking her in his arms. “What I want to ask you is to give yourself up to him entirely during the moral crisis through which he is about to pass; to think only of your son. I led you to understand just now that, in my conversation with Lucien, I felt that I was lacking in the parental authority which you possess. I am sure of your heart. You have again shown how tender and deep is your love to us both. You must never be driven to choose between us. So now, give all your thoughts to him. In bringing him again to your side, you bring him back to me. . . . Perhaps the journey I have thought of will not be very suitable just at present. Lucien still requires more of your tender care. You shall go away somewhere with him, if necessary, to Italy for instance. The all-important matter is to rescue him from this woman who has been too adroit for her intentions not to be bad. At any rate, she has been unmasked, that is the first and perhaps the most important point. . . .”

"Supposing, however, that it is not so? . . ." said the mother. "Yes," she persisted, in response to a gesture of her husband's, "if she succeeds in persuading him that it is a calumny?"

"She cannot do that," replied Darras. "Méjan exists. I tell you again that I mentioned his name. The child exists. Lucien knows where he is. How do you suppose this girl can prevent him finding out for himself the truth of what I have said?"

"If, however, she does prevent it? . . ."

"I shall then apply to the Ministère de l'Intérieur," replied Albert. "You know I have some good friends there. I shall secure official papers, if necessary, and nothing will avail before the evidence of these. . . ."

"And suppose, he loves her enough to still persist in spite of this shame? . . ."

"He? Do not slander your son, Gabrielle. He has been deceived, simply because he is so noble, so generous. But he can never be corrupted, degraded, never! . . ."

"Ah! Albert, it is you who are so noble, so generous," she said, this time taking his hand and kissing it, with such a swift movement, that he had not time to evade it. "You make excuses for him. Oh! accept my gratitude!"

"I am neither noble nor generous," he replied. "It is something much simpler than that. I love you. We are one in heart and mind. Do you wish my feelings towards your son to be different from yours? . . . It

is because of the entire and absolute sympathy between you and me, that I can forgive him. True, I have been angry with him lately, but do you know why? Because he was the cause of my making a secret of my suspicions. Yes, it has cost me a great deal to be silent, to have thoughts that I could not share with you. You know all now, and it is a sweet relief after all."

He kissed her again, as he spoke these words, words which carried so much pain to the wife, that she could have cried out. She listened to them, and there she was in the same attire she had worn but three hours ago on her visit to Father Euvrard, at the very time when the violent and calamitous interview between her husband and son was taking place. On whose account had it taken place, if not on hers? She was seized with terrible remorse at the thought of the secret she was withholding from this loyal-hearted man. The courage to speak awoke in her. Her lips prepared to make the avowal. She began: "Listen, Albert. . . ." Suddenly she intuitively realised with awful clearness the consequences of this avowal if she completed it. The dearest convictions of her husband would be shattered at one stroke. She realised his amazement and suffering, and the breach which would be created just when there was so much necessity for them to act in unison. The matter not only affected themselves, it concerned Lucien also. She felt herself bound by the silence which had so long served as a shelter for her timidity, and when he en-

quired: "What is the matter? What do you want to say to me?" she nestled up to him with the enigmatic phrase, "Promise me, dear one, that you will never love me less, whatever happens. . . ."

"What can happen," he enquired again, "united as we are?"

"I don't know . . ." she murmured. "You see how trial arises without our ever expecting it. Could we have dreamt a year ago that Lucien would cause us so much grief? . . . What is he doing? Where is he? Oh! I should like to have him here now."

CHAPTER III

BERTHA PLANAT

WHAT feelings and those the deepest were brought to light, though not expressed in the half-hidden avowal of this ambiguous speech;—the agony of her religious scruples, revived by the startling suddenness of the test to which they were to be put,—the apprehension of the distressing struggles before her when she revealed to her husband the doubts and fears of her renewed faith,—the certainty that this revelation could not long be delayed, however she might try to suppress it by silence,—the remorse consequent on the knowledge of having brought so much sorrow, in spite of herself, on a husband, so generous, so upright, and so tender; and then, in addition to all this, the terror of what awaited her in this passion of Lucien for a woman of whom much was to be feared. Of all these feelings, the only one that occurred to the mind of Darras was the last, and it was the only one he shared. The bitterness of this was all the keener to him, as Lucien's very words were still sounding in his ears, and he could not forget the look and tone which accompanied them. He had made up his mind to keep his wife in ignorance of the details of this terrible scene.

Their talk ended in a renewed effort on the part of Darras to allay his wife's fears. But he could not hide from himself the uneasiness he felt at the sudden discovery of his stepson's feeling towards him, a state of things which he had not suspected. This uneasiness increased during the afternoon, spent by him wholly in his study, under the pretext of having a business matter to think over, and by Gabrielle in attention to small household matters. In reality the thoughts of both were full of the absent one. The least noise in the house set their hearts beating. . . . A vehicle wheeled along the street. Was it going to stop? Was he in it? The doorbell rang. Was it he, or had he sent a message? It was nothing! . . . The mother could bear it no longer. She returned to Albert and for the tenth time, but under another form, repeated the agonised enquiry, "Where is he?" What could he reply, except to repeat the same reassuring words! But in his heart, Darras put the same question to himself, and the picture of Lucien, still fresh in his memory, again presented itself with painful distinctness, as he stood in the doorway of his office at the *Grand-Comptoir*, hatred in his eyes, and a threat on his lips. Was it possible that this child, his adopted son, could have uttered such farewell words? . . .

"Where am I going? . . . To prove that your spies have lied, and when I have the proofs, you will have to retract your calumnies. And you shall retract them, or never shall I see you again in this life."

"I shall have nothing to retract," the stepfather had replied. This outrageous behaviour completely took away his self-possession. "I know too well what proofs you will find. It is you, understand me, who will return and ask my pardon for having forgotten that I am the husband of your mother."

"I have not forgotten that . . ." Lucien had said. He had repeated it. "I have not forgotten that," and again fiercely, "do not touch that wound also, unless you wish words to pass between us that can never be forgiven. . . ."

Such had been the closing words of this tragic scene in which for the first time since Lucien's mother had changed the name of Chambault for that of Darras, the son had taken it upon himself to deliver his judgment on this second marriage and condemn it. To Darras this had been a great shock, the effects of which were still with him as he sat sorrowfully waiting in his study this afternoon. He mentally repeated the words, full of such potent meaning, and again he was overcome with a sense of indignation.

"How could he do it?" . . . he asked himself. "How? . . . It is true, he was beside himself, but it is precisely at such times that our real thoughts come to light. What then must his be? . . ."

Darras lost himself in reflections in which he vainly strove to apply his usual principle of disciplining his feelings in conformity with his ideal—the abstract man

of conscience;—a process which he called in his mathematician's language, "determining his moral limits." As he had stated to his wife, he loved Lucien. For many years he had looked upon him as a son whose mind had been moulded by him. During the last few months, the teacher had certainly allowed an atmosphere of reserve to grow up between himself and his pupil, but never for a moment had he imagined that the estrangement he suspected was partly due to personal hatred towards himself. The discovery brought sorrow, almost physical pain to his heart, for the ill-will thus suddenly manifested by his stepson for his home life wounded him in the most vulnerable spot of his married life. Yet his love for this heartless child was still so firm, that in spite of what had passed, he pitied him with a pity as heartfelt and disinterested as the mother's. The very thought of what Lucien was passing through at this moment was painful in the extreme. He had been forced to perform the surgical operation—he himself had spoken of his rôle of monitor in these terms. Had the necessity arisen he would have begun again to denounce the unworthiness of this Bertha Planat, on which subject it had been necessary to enlighten Lucien. He had no doubt that he had saved him from a great danger, but at the cost of what tears of anguish! In imagination he saw the tear-stained face of the young man. He pictured Lucien's suffering, and the agonised questions of the mother found an echo in the innermost

depths of his own being. He too asked himself,—“Where is he? What is he doing?” And reason to himself as he might, he was alarmed.

Darras and his wife ignored a fact essential to the right understanding of the drama of which Lucien's heart was the stage. The details supplied to the engineer by his detective neither informed him concerning the real nature of the relations between the young man and Bertha Planat, nor gave her complete history. That she was his stepson's mistress was a point on which the father had no doubt. He had never even discussed the probability of its being otherwise, and the mother had accepted the supposition without hesitation. To put the matter in its true light, we may say at once not only that Lucien was not the young girl's lover, but that in spite of his great love for her, and although leading the free and easy student-life of the Quartier Latin and seeing one another daily, Lucien had never told her of his love. This anomaly, for such it is, even in these days when the education of women tends in some quarters to largely modify the relation between the sexes,—this anomaly arose, as do so many other unusual friendships, from very simple causes. These will reveal themselves as the two characters develop. It was necessary to state the fact at this point in order to understand the keenness of the sorrow felt by Lucien after this conversation with his stepfather. His parting words were like the cry of an animal under the butcher's knife, and he had bitten

ferociously as an animal might. Pierced to the quick, a brute-like impulse had brought to his lips just those words which could most hurt his torturer, and no sooner were they uttered than the same frenzied impulse drove him from the room. He fled from the reply of Darras and his own anger. Scarcely were the words uttered when he realised with stupefaction what they meant to the one who had been the friend of his childhood. They represented so little the real state of his mind and heart. He had always respected his stepfather. He had been influenced entirely by him, had completely accepted his ideas. But when a natural law has been violated in the relationship existing between two beings, no good intention, no virtue even, can hinder the suffering which sooner or later will be inflicted by the one on the other. So it is when the husband of a divorced woman fills the place of father to the child of the first marriage,—when that father is still living. In vain does he display the utmost delicacy of sentiment, the most scrupulous regard for his stepson's feelings; between the two is an abyss which cannot be bridged so as to produce that instinctive mutual understanding necessary to complete family life, which results from blood relationship alone. The stepfather is always the new arrival in the home; the stranger. It is just as futile for the mother to pour upon the boy her wealth of affection. He knows that his love has not sufficed her. The mere presence of the stepfather is a daily proof of this. He grows up. He

has his friends. He hears from them details of their home life. His self-respect suffers in the first place, when he realises that there is a difference between his parents and theirs. Then there is less reverence for his mother when he begins to understand everything. He does not love her the less; he is still fond of his stepfather,—it is their union he dislikes. This feeling has possibly never been put into words. It has gradually been built up during childhood and youth by a hundred and one trifling incidents not one of which has left a distinct trace in the victim's memory, but all of which are stamped on the obscure sub-consciousness of his soul. A store of hidden bitterness is gradually accumulated, to be one day suddenly brought to the surface by a violent shock and to manifest itself in a rush of unsuspected malice. Thus it came to pass with Lucien. When he found himself alone on the staircase of the *Grand-Comptoir* after his dispute with Darras, for a second he was overcome with wonder at it all, even the pain of the hideous denunciation was forgotten. But the last words spoken to his stepfather were real. He was not dreaming. Standing on one of the steps, in the midst of the coming and going of the usual afternoon crowd of customers, the contrast between the place and his own stormy feelings seemed for some moments to paralyse his innermost being, a state of mind often caused by sudden catastrophes. Then all at once, the truth of the situation repossessed him. Every detail of

the accusation brought against Bertha Planat, clear and precise as it was, stood before him in sharp relief, as does every image associated with the beloved one in the lover's mind:—the departure from Clermont; the life in Paris with Méjan; the rupture; the birth of the little boy, and the putting out to nurse at Moret. A deadly pang tore afresh the heart of the young man. A flood of hatred against the denunciator surged up in his heart, and then came the determination,—unreasoning, impetuous, irrevocable as soon as formed,—to confound him. He rushed down the steps, three at a time, ran across the immense hall surrounded by desks, and found himself in the Avenue de l'Opéra, which leads to the colossal building that all Parisians know so well, looking for an empty cab. A few more minutes, and having found what he wanted, Lucien was seated in a cab going full speed to an out-of-the-way corner of the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, where Mlle. Planat lived.

“24 rue Rollin . . .” he had shouted to the driver, at the same time indicating the shortest route to take. He little thought that while he was thus on his way to this unknown side street,—all that is left of the ancient rue Neuve-Saint-Étienne in which Pascal died,—his mother was in a neighbouring one, equally ancient, making her way to the house of the proscribed priest, where was held the interview with which this narrative commenced. The similarity of setting to these two tragedies was in itself symbolic. Were not both the out-

come of a similar cause? Neither step would have been taken if Gabrielle had not married a second time. But even if Lucien had known this fact, his mind was so imbued with his stepfather's doctrines that he would have deemed it nothing more than a chance coincidence. If he had all along and without recognising it suffered from his mother's second marriage, the pain had been unreasoning, almost physical. He had never questioned the right or wrong of divorce. That his parents' disregard for the greatest law of social life could entail sorrow for themselves and their family was a thought which never entered his mind. But indeed he never even gave a thought to his mother in the fevered half-hour's ride across Paris. His whole energy was concentrated on the one point,—how best to enter upon the explanation he must have with her who had been so grossly slandered.

"She must know these infamous reports,—she must! . . ." he said to himself when the cab began to move. "We will find out together the origin of these abominable lies. She will help me to discover it, and I will assist her by putting a speedy end to the matter at once. . . ." The cab had scarcely turned the corner by the Louvre when other words came to his lips. "How terrible it will be to repeat this foul slander to her! If only she understands that I have not the least doubt of her,—that I have not come to ask her to justify herself on my account. It is for her, for her future, that it is

necessary to confound these scoundrels who have put such vile calumnies into circulation. Who can it be? Who on earth is it? . . .” The anguish called forth by this question was all at once so great that a temptation assailed him. He would order the driver to return to the *Grand-Comptoir*; he would go up to his stepfather’s office and demand from him the name of the person or persons who were responsible for these filthy tales. His hand was raised to pull the bell, but fell before any sound was made. “No, I will not see him again yet,” he said to himself; “after the way in which I left him, I owe it to myself to bring him a proof to show that he has been deceived, for that he certainly has. Knowing him to be what he is, I feel sure that nothing would have induced him to speak of any one as he did of Bertha, if there had been the least shadow of a doubt in his mind. He has been deceived. By whom? . . .”

The feelings of respect and contempt are the most spontaneous of our nature. The partiality of a passionate love cannot destroy the one, nor the violence of an unjust hatred do away with the other. Lucien’s estimate of his stepfather’s honour was in no way impaired by his anger. This respect for the character of Darras, although the young man did not acknowledge it, gave peculiar weight to his stepfather’s testimony. If a man is scrupulous in one thing, he is so in others; if incapable of lying, he will not repeat unverified assertions. Lucien did not put this reasoning into so many

words, but the mere fact of recalling the fine features of his stepfather's character was sufficient to give another tone to his thoughts. Involuntarily he went over the history of his friendship with Mlle. Planat, prompted by his passionate desire to find in each individual episode new proofs that the slanderer, whoever he might be, had not spoken the truth.

Although it was a favourite habit of his, since he fell in love with her, to give way to these retrospective musings, either on his way to meet Bertha, or after he had left her, never had he repeated so often and so ardently the half-whispered words: "My dear friend! My best friend! . . ." Or again, he exclaimed aloud, "No, it is impossible! . . ." Against what was he rebelling with such violence? Was the cry elicited at the thought of the difficulty he would have in repeating the slanderous statements to the young girl? Or was it a reply to those very calumnies, in the name of all the memories evoked by the streets he was passing through? These exclamations became more and more frequent the nearer the cab drew to the Quartier Latin, associated as this place was with the incidents of their romance. This love story of the law student and Bertha Planat had in the main been very simple. At no other moment, however, in the history of our social life could it have taken place, before the revolutionary principle of equality had sapped that most ancient of customs, the difference in the education of the sexes, to which allusion has already

been made. Similarly, would the drama of religious strife about to be enacted in the Darras family have taken place twenty-five years earlier? Both facts, carefully analysed, enable the observer to measure the change which is going on in our country, under the influence of laws of general application but which react upon private thought and feeling. Such examples prove the truth of the axiom laid down by the acutest student of social phenomena in the nineteenth century, "The individual is carried away by society." The future will decide whether this current leads on to progress or to that decadence, so rudely but forcibly defined by the same philosopher as "disintegration."

It was ten months since Lucien de Chambault had met Bertha Planat for the first time in a circulating library at the corner of the rue Monsieur-le-Prince and the rue Antoine. Well-known to many generations of students, the library was famous for its scientific books and drew its readers chiefly from the habitués of the *École pratique*, which building was almost immediately behind. Lucien had casually dropped in to consult a work on medical law for a paper on the "Right of Punishment," which he was preparing for a small students' club known as the *Categorical Imperative*, a name highly indicative, revealing as it does the inmost spirit of a period, and betraying the fact that Albert Darras' stepson had not grown up without being affected by the atmosphere of undefined religious philos-

ophy characteristic of the leading intellects of the Third Republic. In thought and sentiment, Lucien belonged to the best minds of the generation born about the year 1880, a generation which already exhibits the results of a teaching running counter to all our national traditions. The major part of this generation are selfish and unscrupulous hustlers. The small minority, the general staff of the army of "progress," are ill-balanced minds, in whom the critical spirit, sharpened to its keenest edge, coexists with a naïve and immature credulity. These young men are at once unsettled and dogmatic, sceptics and fanatic sectaries. Their lack of any grasp on the realities of life is as great as their knowledge is extensive; they would destroy all existing order, whilst dreaming of an impossible millennium. Hypnotised by the latest phase of thought, stimulating each other to unhealthy activity, they exhaust their energies in elaborating programmes which they take as seriously as if they represented something actually accomplished,—programmes which always involve the entire reconstruction of something or another—the nation, society, humanity. In their eagerness to re-fashion the world, and by a strange irony of which their subtlety has not forewarned them, they are the destined prey of the stalest utopian ideals long since condemned by history. One of the characteristics of this younger generation is their constant appeal to the conscience. But the execrable Kantian doctrine with which their

elders have indoctrinated them leads them to interpret this principle of conscience in the narrowest and most sterile spirit. Under the pretext of applying the famous axiom: "Act always in such a way that thy actions may serve as a universal law," these young men are absorbed in the complacent idolatry of their own opinions. They clothe their individual point of view with all the dignity of an ethical principle, and thus arrive at an intolerant anarchism, so to speak, of which the narrow egotism is in strange contrast with the wide culture after which they strive. One virtue they do possess, as it is only fair to point out. Their philosophic principles, pedantically intolerant as they are, make them not unfrequently very scrupulous in all that regards the relation of the sexes. There is something of the Puritan and Jansenist about them. This moral disposition was already noticeable,—as will have been seen in the conversation of Darras with his wife,—in the preceding generation, with its doctrine of morality divorced from religious sanctions. New terms are required to define such complex and artificial conditions of mind, in which the arrogant cult of intellect, the secret hatred of instinct and its impulses, and a jealous rivalry of dogmatic religion, may result in true asceticism.

Let us add that the fervour of these singular young men finds a vent in other directions. Owing to their undivided interest in social questions, there is no leisure for the play of romantic feeling (happy privilege of

their age) in brains bemused with abstractions. But this self-imposed tension of mind is not unfrequently accompanied by sudden changes and disconcerting surprises. Nature held in and stultified is always ready to revenge herself in the heart of the young. Let the given woman appear at the given hour, and the lover will be revealed behind the student, but a lover who does not therefore throw off his customary methods of thought. What unexpected developments may not take place when so singular a temperament is subjected to the passion of love?

This sketch of the latest psychological type, already represented so largely as to yield the dominant note in the future of the French middle class, might be elaborated, but it will suffice to indicate the particular shade of feeling awakened in the heart of Lucien, as, buried in the corner of the cab, he recalled the day when first he met Bertha and loved her at first sight. The spacious room of the *Salon littéraire et scientifique*, with its walls hidden by bookcases, opened itself out before his mind's eye. Rows and rows of books, in grey or black cloth, staringly numbered, stood on the shelves. On the ink-stained wooden tables were piled newspapers and magazines. He pictured himself as he stood there, waiting for the books he had asked for, and carelessly glancing at the few readers scattered up and down the room. It was then he noticed in the right-hand corner by the end-window, a young girl, busy making notes

from a large volume in front of her. Her pale and charming face, with its delicate features, expressed that absorbed attention characteristic of the true student lost for the time being to all else but the actual object of study. During the whole hour Lucien remained in the room under the pretext of reading, but really for the purpose of looking more closely at her, so captivated was he by the charm and fascination of this face, the stranger's eyes were not once lifted from the work she had undertaken. Her lowered eyelids were fringed with long curling eyelashes, the dark shade of which harmonised with the colour of her eyes, eyes that like those on the faded surface of an old portrait, stood out as brown patches against the whiteness of her skin. At times when most absorbed in her work, and when, having read an important passage, she prepared to summarise it, she raised her eyelids, and her look revealed her concentrated thought. She bit the end of her penholder, her teeth showing white and even between lips at the corners of which a hard line had formed. She had taken off her hat, and the oval of her intelligent head could be distinguished under her hair, parted in the middle. The thick plait of bright brown hair betokened abundant vitality, but vitality on which weariness had left a mark only too evident in the thin outline of her cheek, the slenderness of her neck, the spare attenuation of her figure as she bent over the table. The hands, beautiful in shape, had an almost manly

energy, a trait revealed again by the broad and powerful forehead, behind which burned a virile intelligence. Yet the general effect of her personality was essentially feminine, as evinced in her slight and fragile form, the measured grace of her movements, and an undefinable delicacy which seemed to call aloud for help and protection. She was simply, almost poorly dressed, but her collar was spotlessly clean. The black alpaca oversleeves, carefully put on to protect dress and cuffs, revealed a need for economy, and at the same time a wish to be neatly dressed, shown also in every part of her attire. She wore well-shaped, low-heeled shoes, fastened up with dainty laces. The sight of a young and beautiful girl in this students' resort, busily intent on her literary work, could not but first surprise and then arouse the interest of this young man of three-and-twenty, himself cultured, industrious, and possessing idealist convictions which until then had suppressed the ardent impulses of heart and senses. He had found no pleasure in the society of his mother's friends. They were either too frivolous or too silly to please him. Such of the unfortunate class as he had met in the company of his comrades had disgusted him by their coarseness. His only knowledge of the realities of love had left a feeling of remorse consequent on actions prompted by the curiosity of the moment and followed by months of loathing. Was it surprising that the inexplicable charm of the stranger, her delicately cut

profile refined by thought as she bent over her scientific books, should have had a potent and immediate influence upon him? This apparition embodied all those manifold graces of which for some time past he had been unconsciously dreaming. Only when Bertha Planat picked up her papers and prepared to leave, was he aware of the sudden revolution that had taken place in his feelings. The certainty that she was about to pass out of his sight affected him so much that his whole being was thrilled with emotion. For a moment he felt tempted to leave the room before her, so that he could wait for and follow her as she went on her way. An unsurmountable feeling of shyness held him to his chair. Meanwhile she removed her oversleeves, took her hat from the peg on which it hung, arranged it on her head with as much composure as if she had been the only person present. She left the room after having returned to the desk the two volumes she had been using. She had evidently intimated to the old lady in charge, that she wished them to be kept for her, for they were at once put aside with a familiar sign of consent, which would not have been given to a casual reader. Lucien concluded that if he visited the place again, he would be sure to find the young girl there too. This unmistakable indication that she was an habituée of the reading room contributed to the apparent serenity of his feelings as he watched her disappear behind the glass-door and round the corner of the street. Should

he question the house-porter or the old lady about her? A feeling of delicacy hindered him. He could, however, not resist the temptation five minutes later of going up to the desk on which the two volumes were still lying, under the pretext of requiring some information. While the assistant librarian looked in the catalogue for the book he had named haphazard, Lucien fearlessly took up one of the two volumes that lay there, and looked at it apparently quite casually. For the first time he was brought into physical touch with the absent one, and the mere fact of his turning over the leaves that had been fingered by her, sent a thrill through his whole being. He remarked, not without some surprise as well as gratification,—for the fact would certainly help him in finding her again,—that the book was the first volume of Trousseau's *Clinique de l'Hôtel-Dieu*. She was evidently a medical student. A piece of paper left between two pages attracted the lover's attention. It was placed in the middle of the celebrated lecture on "Scarlet Fever," and on it were pencilled the words,—"*p. 29 medical duty, to summarise.*" It was the young girl who had thus indicated that she had a note to make. Lucien hurriedly glanced up and down the page, with strange earnestness in his look. His eye fell upon the following lines, and in reading them his heart beat with pleasure as he associated the sentiment of professional dignity expressed in the words with the mysterious and beautiful student:

“For some time past I have used affusions. I employed them in my private practice before administering them at the hospital. I have never ventured to introduce anything which I had not previously tested on my private patients. In acting thus my reputation in society has run great risks, and I have often been ill-repaid for the good which I endeavoured, with earnest conviction, to bring about. But I have never deviated from the path duty pointed out to me. . . .”

Such was the atmosphere of lofty and stern thought in which the young girl lived. Ten months had passed since the day he had found the piece of paper left in the book, and in finding it had learned the secret of the student's trend of thought. Hardly a day of these ten months had passed without his seeing her, and not once on any one of them had she by action, word, or gesture belied the judgment he had instinctively passed on her. Picture after picture rose to his mind, and crowded one on the other, especially of those days which had immediately followed the first meeting and had preceded the first words they interchanged with one another. On the next day and every afternoon following, Lucien went to the reading room. To make sure that he could pass whole days there without in any way compromising the young girl, he notified the librarian that he was a law-student, and his researches would be protracted, as he was preparing a thesis. As an additional precaution,

when he noticed that she regularly entered the room about four o'clock, the hour she left the *École pratique*, he made a practice of coming at three. He placed himself in such a position that he could see her as she came down the street. She was always alone. She entered the room, exchanged a few words with the old lady at the desk, and sat down in the same corner, her place being reserved by a chair leant against the table. She removed her hat, slipped on her oversleeves, and commenced to work. So completely did she put herself apart from those about her, that not one of the habitués,—amongst whom were quite young men like Lucien,—seemed to take any notice of her. Was not this a proof that her behaviour there had always been what it was now? Eighteen days after having first seen her Lucien did not even know her name. He never heard any of the readers either speak to, or of her. It was about this time that they became acquainted with one another, under circumstances so accidental as to preclude the idea of premeditation on his part, or of coquetry on hers. How vividly the scene recalled itself to the young man's imagination! . . . One afternoon about the beginning of May, as he reached the rue Monsieur-le-Prince, his whole being fevered by the emotions of love when it is still in the stage of dream and expectation, he found the reading room closed. The shutters were up, and on one of the panels was fastened a square piece of paper on which were written the words, "*Closed on account of*

death." Lucien learned from the concierge that the old lady who had charge of the reading room had died suddenly during the night. To do Lucien justice, the idea which now occurred to him, and upon which he at once acted, to remain there and wait for his friend, as he now in thought called her, was not suggested by the sole desire to make the most of this unique opportunity. He remembered that the young girl had always shown a kindly feeling towards the old lady, and he thought perhaps he could break the news of her death gently to Bertha. When he saw her cross the rue de l'École-de-Médecine, and come in the direction of the reading room, he walked towards her with the step of a man who had just received a blow from an unseen obstacle.

"The library is closed, Mademoiselle," he said to her, and as the young girl, though taken aback by the news, seemed to find nothing strange in the fact of one habitué of the place notifying another of the circumstance, he added: "An unfortunate event happened last night. The person who had charge of the library . . ."

"Madame Barillon? . . ." interrupted the young girl. "Is she dead?" Lucien made a sign of assent. The girl's face, usually so meditative and calm, changed in a minute. Her features revealed the emotional susceptibility which she constantly practised to hide. Her eyes filled with tears, although the old lady had only been a chance acquaintance with whom she had occasionally exchanged a few words. She subdued her feelings, how-

ever, at once, and gave expression to a professional opinion.

"I warned her some time ago. She suffered from inflammation of the lungs, in its last stage."

"One would scarcely have thought it. She was always so bright! . . ." remarked Lucien, to continue the conversation.

"She knew neither the nature nor the seriousness of her complaint," replied the young girl. "The doctor attending her, had led her to believe that it was a question of intercostal neuralgia. I never ventured to undeceive her. He had the case in hand, and treated it as he thought best. Madame Barillon, however, mistrusted him. She consulted books, and from them was able to identify some of the symptoms she felt."

"Don't you think that the patient has a right to know the truth as soon as it is his wish to do so, and even without that?" said the young man.

"That is open to question," she replied.

"Not for me," he continued eagerly. "I could never respect a doctor who would lie to me. Without truth there can be no moral sense, and when reasons are given for not keeping to the truth on one point, there will soon be a want of truth in everything."

He uttered his thoughts aloud with such an air of conviction that the young girl was impressed. She raised her eyes to him, and Lucien realised that it was the first time she had really looked at him. He had been

nothing more to her than the other individuals in the reading room. This admission, though painful at the time, was gratifying to him now, as he recalled the memories of those months, few but so precious to him, in his search for weapons against the assailants of Bertha's honour. He was glad that the first words exchanged between them had been of such an impersonal and technical character. He was glad also that he had first attracted the young girl's notice by the avowal of a belief which justified the straightforward talk he was about to have with her. He was pleased above all that the spirit of their first conversation had been that of comradeship. True, this behaviour, so contrary to conventional prejudices, was liable to be misinterpreted. He knew from his own experience that familiarity is most surely checked between man and woman when their friendship is most like that of man for man. In this way, difference of sex seems obliterated, whereas a bashful reserve intensifies it. From the outset the young man was sensible of an entire absence of coquetry in Bertha's behaviour, this being the more marked as her manner was so natural. Impelled by a desire to be still with her, and also to know more about her, he continued:

"As you are studying medicine, Mademoiselle, perhaps you can render me a little help. I am working up the question of the right of punishment and criminal responsibility, and in doing so, have been led to study the subject of criminal lunacy as well. The reading

room is closed. Where do you think I could consult books dealing with these subjects? Legrand du Saullé, for example, whose work I was constantly consulting here? . . .”

“In the library of the École,” she replied. “I am just going there too. I do not like the place much, it is so crowded, but at any rate one meets with civility there, and the catalogue is comprehensive.”

“But I am a law-student,” he replied, and taking out his pocket-book, handed her one of his cards, evidently with the intention of no longer remaining a stranger to her. She took it, and looking at it she said simply: “I think this will be sufficient. But if you will come with me, I can get you in without any difficulty.”

He followed her with beating heart, a prey to an emotion which unnerved him by its tenderness. Together they crossed the rue École-de-Médecine, narrow and uninteresting, with the ground-floors of its houses given up to the medical bookseller and the surgical-instrument maker. Lucien’s one thought was his companion and her grace of carriage, a carriage which betrayed additional attractions, a round and well-proportioned figure, long well-formed limbs, and a firm light step. What must he talk to her about? how fearful he was lest by a word he should disturb the charm of these unhoped-for moments. They had already reached the courtyard, were mounting the main staircase together. They were in the library. There at last he learned the

name and address of the stranger. Bertha Planat was obliged to show her student's ticket, when she introduced her companion. Once inside the room, she left him and bowing her adieu she took her seat at one of the tables, as she did in the other reading room, and became absorbed in her work. Lucien dared not seat himself beside her. For form's sake, he had asked for a book, but scarcely opened it. Then seeing her so engrossed, he left the library. Impelled by an irresistible desire to see what her home was like, and the surroundings of her life, he turned his steps in the direction of the rue Rollin, where he now knew she lived. It was early in the month of May, and these slopes of the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève seemed fanned by the breath of youth and love. It was five o'clock. The dome of the Panthéon, with its grey colonnade, was enveloped in the soft clear light of the azure sky. Green leaves fluttered on the branches of the trees, whose scanty roots found meagre nourishment in the barren soil. Yet earth's imperishable vitality afforded life to these dry trunks. It palpitated likewise in the stunted sensibilities of the laughing students and girls seated outside the cafés. The joyous springtide of life vibrated in the air. With the self-complacency of the pure-minded lover Lucien felt it too. His was a sacred love, while many others had debased their affections. Musing thus, he reached the rue Vieille-Estrapade and the rue Contrescarpe. Their graphic names and ancient aspect fascinated him.

Their remote and obscure history was a charming foil to his newborn hopes. The poverty and silence of the rue Rollin affected him. It is only used by foot-passengers, leading as it does to a flight of steps which runs down steeply to the rue Monge. The setting sun cast its slanting rays on the side of the street in which stood Bertha's house. It was one of those dwellings, formerly occupied by wealthy families, which even in their ruin bear signs and traces of their aristocratic occupants. The foundations had sunk and the façade had bulged forward, but there was a handsome carriage entrance; the court-yard was choked up with sheds and rubbish, but its windows were lofty and well proportioned. The lover seated himself on an upright stone placed against the steps of the rue Monge, and there he stopped until night began to fall, lost in thought, and intoxicated with an almost superhuman joy. This storming of the heart by the passion of love has its moments of inexpressible intensity, and contrasts strangely with the insignificance of the causes which bring it about, or rather with the pretexts of its existence. What had happened to Lucien? He had learned the name of the young girl whom he loved, her profession, her home, and he had spoken to her. All this was a mere nothing, but sufficient to make the poetic stream course through his veins. Bertha was young, he was young, and it was springtime. The mysterious affinity of spirit, the similarity of thought which had been revealed to him,

such grace wedded to such earnestness, the sharp contrast between her beauty and her work, the freshness and delicacy of her features in association with the sick and dying, hospital beds, operating tables, the strangeness of their meeting and its entire lack of conventionality, the anticipation and longing for their next meeting, what elements these for the awakening of a passionate love in the heart of one of his age, and one who had never loved! With what intensity they had stirred in his heart, what hours had he passed brooding over them. In his memory they were flooded with the radiance of daybreak. Had it not been the dawn of his happiness?

Yes, he had been happy, indeed happy, as one can be at three-and-twenty, with longings unimpaired, and with faith in that gentle being, woman; when the heart expands under the loved one's presence and when her mere presence brings content. Later, the knowledge gained from experience of life, the claims of manly pride, the bitter sense of days passing away, all are inimical to a love unavowed and in which there is no sense of ownership. But the timid heart of youth shrinks from avowal, lest it should offend; the very thought that the loved one will belong to him entirely is so overpowering, that it is almost a relief to defer it. He knows that the future is his. One year, two or ten, will make no difference in the love he bears his loved one, or her love for him. In the delicious thrill of uncertainty as he post-

pones the hour of decisive words, and dallies lingeringly with the delights of dream and hope, he experiences those sensations which are the peculiar charm of courtship days, and since that spring evening Lucien had loved Bertha as one betrothed, with a silent adoration, increasing each day in intensity of feeling. That evening he had not attempted to learn more of her, by questioning the concierge, for instance. Such enquiries would have seemed a sacrilege to him. Would he have had courage enough for them? To lovers of his temperament, the mere utterance of their loved one's name to a third party causes suffering. Their tongue refuses to articulate the word. Moreover, what would have been gained by it? What could he have learnt that he did not already know? The severity of her life, her close application to her work, the loftiness of her thoughts;—all these could be conjectured from her home, her behaviour in the reading room, and by the character of the notes she had made from Trousseau. From that first evening he divined in her, as if by intuition, all those attributes of soul of which the following six months' intimacy proved the existence, an intimacy so entirely free from restraint as to preclude the idea of any mystery. Was it not the most striking proof of the moral worth of the young girl that their friendship had remained so absolutely pure? The various events which had led to the formation of this intimacy came back to Lucien with marked distinctness. . . . After

their first conversation they had made a practice of greeting one another as they entered and left the reading room. Not one of the inclinations of that small intelligent head but had been interpreted by Lucien, now with exquisite joy as an indication of her kindly interest, and then, with anguish, at the thought of her indifference. Then followed their second conversation, not many days after the first. In order to begin this, Lucien had devised a plan, which was significant of the strange contradictions of this love,—a dreamlike flower of the fancy which had sprung up at the contact of these two intelligent natures. He asked the young girl, just as she was rising to go, if she could help him by giving him the true meaning of two technical words which he could not understand, and he showed her,—oh! the mockery of it!—a sentence he had met with in Legrand du Saulle's enormous treatise on latent and imitative diseases. By the time he had formulated his request, they were in the street. Bertha walked on as she replied to him, and he, quite naturally, accompanied her.

"Latent explains itself," she said. "A latent disease is a disease which has not yet manifested itself. An imitative disease, on the contrary, has made itself very palpable, but assumes the form of another. Thus, gout which exhibits the symptoms of vertigo, is imitative gout; it disguises itself, *quæ induit larvam*. *Larva*, you will remember, with the ancients signifies the stage mask."

"I must confess, I had forgotten that . . ." he replied, and almost indifferently, he added: "You know Latin, Mademoiselle?"

"I have taken my degree," she replied.

"That was a senseless question of mine," he said. "You could not have taken up medicine without this diploma. But in France one is not accustomed to see women mastering certain branches of knowledge."

"Things are gradually changing," she said, "happily so. Science is a great emancipator and woman is in greater need of emancipation than man."

"That is just my opinion," said Lucien, "and I hope that still further progress will be made in this direction. I shall nevertheless not be surprised if lady medical students remain in the minority."

"On account of the operating theatre and hospital, I suppose you think?" she asked.

"Exactly."

"You have never dissected, Monsieur," she replied. "Therefore you do not know that there is only a slight sensation to overcome, and that purely physical. It is not long before one regards the corpse as a means of verifying an anatomy lesson. It is difficult to realise that these remains have ever been a human being. The post-mortem is more painful. You get interested in a patient, and receive his confidences. Twenty-four hours later you see him stretched on a table, lifeless, cold as ice,—his brain here, his heart there, and his liver some-

where else. For me, this was, and is still the most horrible sensation, but the only one, because, if at the hospital you are obliged to be a spectator of sad sights, there is always so much good to be done there by a word, an action, or some kindly attention! . . .”

She recounted these details of her professional experience with remarkable simplicity. She had neither in her look nor in her voice that arrogance which is so repellent in the manner of the majority of strong-minded women. She quietly related things as they were, without a thought as to the effect the mention of these repugnant necessities of her calling might have upon the imagination of her questioner. Victim of an ever-increasing curiosity, Lucien continued:

“At the practical school and the hospital there are others besides patients and corpses. There are companions. I do not know many medical students, but it seems to me that the tone of the majority of these should be distasteful to a young girl. . . .”

“You are somewhat mistaken in this,” she replied. “For my part, and, of course, one can only speak of one’s own experience, I have occasionally met with young men, but only a few, whose language was coarse, and when they were with others they were quickly silenced. It often happens at the hospital, when we are asked to examine a patient, we hear behind us remarks and laughter that we should prefer not to hear. It is a form of teasing. They wish to confuse us, so that they can

make fun of our nervousness. . . . A little gravity of manner soon puts a stop to these childish practices. As to those who have other thoughts and express them, if one cuts them short at once they make no second attempt. As far as I am concerned I profess to be the best of comrades, but if ever a student tries to be too familiar I warn him that the moment he talks to me otherwise than he would to a man, I shall cease to recognise him as an acquaintance. . . .”

With these words she left her companion at the door of the same creamery in the rue Racine in which, later, Albert Darras was to find the young people side by side. Lucien watched her as she entered the long room, already full of diners. As in the reading room, here too, she had a place reserved for her. The wooden tables, devoid of cloths, the coarse crockery and thick glass corresponded only too well with the inscription on the front of the house, *Dinner 1 fr. 10*. Silent pity filled the lover's heart at the poverty-stricken appearance of the place, and at the same time the young girl's last words overwhelmed him with pained surprise. He was to know later the feelings that had prompted her to utter them. There are certain intangible, but nevertheless manifest signs by which two kindred souls recognise each other. The simple assertion made by Lucien as to a patient's right to know the truth, had been one of these signs for Bertha. Although she endeavoured, as she said, to be on terms of comradeship with the other

students, she would never have allowed a stranger whom she had met in a library to address her and enter into conversation with her, if in so doing she had not yielded to an impulse of her heart. She had punished herself in uttering these parting words. It was a barrier raised between herself and the young man, should he have entertained any rash hope with regard to their friendship. Supposing he did not attempt to see her again, or even if she did see him once more, this plain speaking admitted of no doubt; he could not make love to her. How vivid these recollections still were in Lucien's mind. How distressed he had been as he continued his way up the rue Racine, lest he had in any way acted indiscreetly or annoyed her by his questions. What a night of anguish he had passed, wondering if she would ever forgive him for having questioned her! When he saw her again, what a joy to find that she did not seem vexed with him! . . . Then they had their third talk, followed by their fourth, their fifth.

How these conversations and the numberless ones that followed came to his mind one after the other as his journey across Paris brought him closer to the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève. In all, both during the early part of their friendship with its restrained intercourse, and later when the intercourse was more confidential, he had faithfully kept to the programme of absolute silence on tenderer subjects laid down by Mlle. Planat. He

had treated her as if she had been a friend, studying at the *École de Médecine*, with whom he exchanged opinions and thoughts, and not as the adorable girl whose presence was a disquieting element in his life, whose simple grace and gentle smile kindled a passionate love within his breast, and whose brave battle with life moved his admiration. Not one of the paving stones, since the cab had left the Pont Neuf, but reminded him of something Bertha had said, something she had done, of some look. . . . Here, at the corner of Saint Michel Square, he had met her one morning on her way to the *Hôtel-Dieu*, six weeks after the beginning of their friendship. She had allowed him to accompany her to the hospital and go in with her. It was the first time he had seen her occupied in her calling. They had followed the doctor in his rounds. They had returned together and lunched in the rue Racine. . . . Here, under the trees of the boulevard Saint-Germain, on the warm summer evenings, when they had become closer friends, they had strolled, discussing with one another their favourite theories. His, that of the individual conscience being the supreme law; hers, the belief in a morality founded on facts alone, and which was no other than applied biology. These two tendencies, so different as to be exact opposites, which divide the youth of to-day into two classes, and which will one day come into open conflict, were personified in these two young people. These discussions

not only opened up a new world of thought to Lucien, but to hear these modern theories of life expounded by such lovely lips had a strangely alluring charm. . . . Before the Collège de France and at the foot of Claude Bernard's statue, about the beginning of autumn as he remembered, she had related the growth of her ideas. Three men, she told him, had exercised a decisive influence on her: Claude Bernard and his *Médecine expérimentale*, Flaubert, and Dostoiewsky. From the one novelist she had learnt to look at life as it truly is, the other had taught her his poignant sympathy with human misery. What she admired in Bernard was his method of thought. She had spoken too of her education, firstly at Thiers, then at Clermont, where she lived with her uncle, and was taught by a retired professor, M. André, who had taken a great interest in her. Lucien told her about his stepfather. . . . Again near the Panthéon, when ceremonies in honour of the illustrious dead were taking place, they had one day discussed religion and politics, and he had been astonished at the calm fearlessness and intelligence of this woman, who had outstripped him on these two topics, as she did in moral philosophy. In her belief, that biology, now in its beginnings, would eventually be instrumental in renewing the whole plan of human existence, Bertha avowed a system of nihilism with respect to institutions of the past and present, and included in the same condemnation, Catholicism and Kantism, traditional mon-

archy and the republic. The young man had felt the fascination of these daring opinions, this logical extension of the principles which had been imparted to him. In comparing himself mentally with his friend, he felt he was only, as was his stepfather also, one of the middle class, and one imbued with the prejudices of that class. He had admired the robust intelligence of the girl-student, just as he admired the steadfastness of mind with which she mapped out her life,—not a minute lost, not a penny spent uselessly. She had inherited a small sum of fifteen hundred pounds of which she took out a hundred, leaving the remainder until she started for herself, at the end of her studies. It was quite recently she had told all this to Lucien. Her meals at a shilling, brought the cost of her food to three pounds a month. Dress and personal expenses took another twenty-five pounds; books, eight pounds; examination fees, the same sum,—these were the other chief items of her budget. She had chosen this room in the rue Rollin for its low rent, in keeping with the rest of her expenses.

The rue Rollin! It was close by now. For while his memory had been undergoing this ordeal, the cab had sped along, and the lover was nearly at his journey's end. The reminiscences of the past suddenly gave place to the bitter reality of the present as he passed the Lycée Henri IV. The familiar aspect of this district, asso-

ciated as it had been during these months with the sweetest and most intense emotions of his youth, lacerated his feelings. His stepfather's accusation again formulated itself in his brain. How hideously it contrasted with the daydreams in which throughout the past year he had indulged at this very spot,—dreams which he had just recalled with an energy bordering on hallucination. Could this gracious being have lied to him, was her reserve a sham, could this terrible secret of guilty motherhood be hidden under such simple and modest behaviour; in short, was it possible that she whom he loved with so much reverence and tenderness and to whom he had not told his love, had been another man's mistress? Every vision which memory evoked of incidents, simple in themselves but charged with so much poetry for him, protested against the truth of the accusation, and yet, on the point of seeing his calumniated friend, he was afraid. These fancies which had brought her so near to him, could not speak with the authority of the accuser. Now, as he neared the rue Rollin, Lucien pictured to himself the details of the scene through which he must pass. He would pass through the doorway, go step by step up the staircase, and enter the room. Then he would be obliged to disclose the horrible story. The mere thought of the young girl listening to such words, was intolerable to him. The sentence which had been the guiding principle of their friendship occurred to him at once, "I warn him that

from the day his conversation is other than that he would address to a man I shall cease to know him." She who considered the least allusion to love, an insult, —would she allow him to finish the outrageous story? She would dismiss him at once. This rare and exquisite intimacy, hiding so much passionate joy under the disguise of an interchange of ideas, would be at an end. The lover had often asked himself without ever being able to answer the question: "What does she think of me?" He would question no more. Bertha would despise him. She would hate him. The anxiety called forth by this prospect was so painful that Lucien would willingly have delayed the moment in which he would take a step that would probably be irrevocable. He was now at the corner of the Contrescarpe Square whose old-world name had pleased him so well. This reminiscence once more brought vividly to mind his first pilgrimage to his friend's house. He got out of the cab and walked to the rue Rollin. It was not quite three o'clock—the hour when Bertha as a rule worked at the *École pratique*. But she had told him the evening before, that, as she would be obliged to stay later at the Hôtel-Dieu and lunch there, she would return home. (It will be seen that Albert Darras was wrong in supposing that his stepson had gone to confer with his accomplice before going to the *Grand-Comptoir*.) But she might have changed her mind. The prospect of an additional respite brought on another crisis of hesi-

tation. He passed backwards and forwards in front of the house with a beating heart, and in a state of panic indecision of which he was ashamed. But the power of control to which he had been trained from his earliest years by his stepfather reasserted its sway. His own words came back to his mind: "*Without truth there can be no moral sense. . . .*" He repeated the word "truth," again and again, he impressed it deeply on the innermost recesses of his soul, and entered the house as if he were advancing against a loaded pistol in a duel. He had made no enquiries at the hall porter's window, but his mind was now so fully made up, that when he reached the landing and saw the key in the door, he uttered a sigh of relief. A knock with his knuckles on the door, the two words "Come in," pronounced by the voice he had so trusted,—a turn of the key, and he stood before her.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRUTH COMES OUT

SHE had recognised the young man's knock. Accordingly she did not rise from the chair in which she was sitting. On the desk in front of her lay an atlas open at the page which contained a representation of the anatomy of the leg. The interlacing of the blood vessels, nerves and muscles round the bone, was traced by a number of strips of paper cut up and coloured blue, black, grey, and red, which were arranged above the printed page. With the fingers of her left hand Bertha was carefully lifting one of these strips, while her right was busy with a notebook already covered with pencil jottings. Lucien recognised the memoranda which she used to carry to the hospital for the morning visits. She welcomed his arrival with a polite inclination of her pretty head which hardly turned, and without breaking off from her work she said to him:

"I am just making a thorough study in advance of an operation I shall be present at to-morrow. It is the case of the man in No. 32, you remember, the man with gangrene in his right foot. They have had a consulta-

tion on his case, and it does not admit of further delay. You know how Professor Louvet is always in favour of radical measures. He wants to amputate above the knee to make sure that no symptoms shall recur. But Graux the surgeon was brought in, and then it was another story; Graux would not take off the whole of the foot even. He thinks it would meet the case to cut away half the foot. These gentlemen discussed the matter, each supporting his own view with all the arguments suggested by his profound knowledge, and meanwhile between them there lay the patient on the bed, the coverlet drawn back to expose his poor legs, the one distorted and the other gangrenous. When at last they had done theorising and were silent, 'What if we split the difference?' suddenly said the sick man, pointing to a spot below his knee. It was said so humourously that all the students burst out laughing. Not so I. . . . I felt distressed. I shall never have enough strength of mind to look on a human creature as a mere subject for scientific experiments. Graux and Louvet thought no more of the poor wretch than if he had been a lump of clay instead of a living man. They were full of their own ideas. That is the true scientist. But I cannot bring myself to it. In the end they will adopt the middle course as the patient suggested. The leg will be cut off between the foot and the knee to-morrow. When this was settled the owner of the leg made one more remark. With less humour but more significance

he said: 'I feel better. It is a comfort to know the worst.' "

Engrossed in her recollection of this gruesome scene, the strange girl had at first taken no notice of the expression of Lucien's face. She now shut the atlas with scrupulous care. The whole of the room bore evidence to the method and neatness that she had developed within its narrow limits. A square room, very lofty, its windows with their carved wainscots preserved the elegance of days gone by. They looked on to a cluster of trees, another relic of the olden time, when the present dilapidated tenement was a baronial mansion like the one at its side, where dwelt M. de Caumartin, Bishop of Blois, the same who annoyed Louis XIV. by the cruelly satirical speech in which he welcomed the Bishop of Noyon to the Academy. These trees which perhaps belonged to him now serve as a hygienic advertisement to a middle-class boarding house. On this particular murky afternoon in March, their yet naked branches stood out in gloomy distinctness against the cold background of the sky seen beyond the casement. The grey light was in complete harmony with the tone of the furniture which the young girl had brought with her from her provincial home. The old, cumbersome walnut chairs from Auvergne, rusty and grim, the brownish-red paper, the huge curtains of assorted rep, imparted an air almost of uncouthness to the general effect, which was not relieved but rather intensified by the indications

scattered in all directions of the profession of the *Carveline*, to use the medical schools' forbidding slang for the female aspirant to a doctor's degree. In one corner were surgical instruments set out to dry after being cleaned; in another, a skull, and the various parts of a disarticulated skeleton; in the bookcase some medical works; elsewhere the model of an eye enlarged on cardboard, intended to demonstrate the mechanism of sight. The only objects of art were six large photographs of the prophets of the Sixtine Chapel. Their athletic muscular development seemed to spread the teaching of the dissecting room over the walls. Although the girl student slept in this extraordinary room, no bed was to be seen. Her extreme care for the proprieties, as also the habit she always affected of a masculine kind of sociability, had led her to make the apartment in which she was at home look as much like a consulting room as possible. She slept on a bench, hidden at present by a cover of cretonne. A little closet adjoining sufficed for her toilette and the hanging of her wardrobe. There were, however, certain little details that revealed the woman. On the chest of drawers, for instance, rested a tiny cabinet with receptacles, on which you read the words, Gloves, Ties, Handkerchiefs; while floating in the air the fresh aroma of iris powder mingled with the perfume of a bunch of mimosa bought in the street. Nestling in a glass of water the golden catkins and the delicate foliage of this nosegay from

the sunny south were eloquent of light-hearted youth and unfettered existence, of happy shores and distant pilgrimages. What a contrast to the narrow cell in which she lived, so symbolical of the peculiarities of Bertha's destiny, of her middle-class provincial upbringing, her manner independent but withal reserved, her austere devotion to work, and the innate genius for the elegant which enabled her to remain neat and attractive under conditions in which nineteen out of twenty of her companions lose all claim to gracefulness. Never had Lucien been more sensible than at this moment of the poetry hidden in this room to which he had often found his way but never without a tremor.

A few minutes before, his stepfather had made outrageously insulting remarks about the occupant of this room, and now Lucien saw her again, seated quietly at her daily work, noticed how this tedious work was ennobled by her consistent effort after high and generous thoughts, saw how frail and pretty she looked in her total ignorance of the slander started about her. His feelings were acutely stirred. Tears came to his eyes. The reaction after the extraordinary strain of the past hour was too much for his nerves. He collapsed in his chair and had not strength enough to utter a word, while the silent tears began to trickle over his face.

At last, surprised at his silence, Bertha turned round to face him. She saw the stifled sobs, the convulsed features, the look he bent on her. Not for a moment

was she at a loss for the cause. The decisive hour had come, the hour she had been expecting for days together. The shock was so great that she too was not altogether mistress of herself. She had to take up the atlas which she was going to put away, and there was a catch in her voice as she said:

“You are weeping, Lucien. What is it? What has happened?”

“Presently,” he replied, with a gesture of entreaty, “I will tell you. Just now I cannot. Leave me alone.”

She obeyed, and remained silently watching his still flowing tears. Had he been able to conquer his emotion and reflect a moment, the girl's evident distress would have told him what a hold he had gained upon her heart. She was in love with him as he with her. But how desperate her plight! If Lucien's stepfather was entirely at fault in his interpretation of the facts which had been reported to him, just as he misconstrued the relations existing between the two young people, yet these facts were none the less literally true. Five years previously Bertha Planat had been for several months the mistress of that Méjan whose name Darras had given to his stepson if he required corroborative evidence. By him she had had a son, who was being brought up at her expense at Moret, near Fontainebleau. At the time of this connection she was studying law, which she gave up when they parted, in order to break forever with a circle of young

people among whom her story was known. From that day her slightest actions had been consistently dictated by her antipathy to the past. It was for this reason that she avoided the library of the medical school, which was too crowded. For this reason she had her meals at the poor restaurant in the rue Racine and lodged in a house remote from the centre of the Quartier Latin.

From the day when she had got to know Lucien and to love him, she had lived in a state of perpetual terror at the thought that some chance might bring this past of hers to his knowledge without her being able to explain to him at the same time how free in reality from any low or vulgar associations was this dreadful episode of her nineteenth year. It had been the deplorable but generous fault of confidence foolishly misplaced and disgracefully betrayed. How often in the course of those conversations which had so delighted her with their ever-growing intimacy, which yet never passed the limits of the intellectual, how often had she been tempted to tell her dear and gentle friend her sorrowful story before he heard it from other lips. But she had been held back by a feeling of modesty too strong for all the reasoning by which she succeeded in proving to herself that in giving herself to Méjan she had not done wrong.

Convincingly as we may argue against them, we cannot really succeed in breaking down the evidence of certain laws which nature has indelibly stamped on the

most secret recesses of our moral personality. A father cannot abjure his family; his son will always be to him like no other man. The citizen of the world cannot deny his own country; no other landscape will ever appeal to him like the scenes of his childhood. Similarly, a girl may in the course of her education have imbibed the most revolutionary ideas, as was the case with Bertha Planat, may have felt the intoxication of the most paradoxical heresies, may have pinned her faith to the absolute equality of the sexes and professed scorn for social conventions, that of marriage in particular, may have claimed the right to enter into free union and put her theories into practice under circumstances which almost excused her. All this she may have done. But once let honest and sincere love awake in her, and instinctively she is possessed by unreasoned and invincible shame at the thought of her previous capitulation without the sanction of religion or law. Bertha had refused to admit the existence of this feeling. Yet she had never been free from it. Here was the source of that everlasting temporising, that postponement from day to day of the open confession which she daily yearned to make. Her conscience, on principle, made truthfulness an imperious duty, but conscience had been lulled to sleep by the resolve to wait for the day when Lucien would venture to declare his love.

Beneath all this shyness she was distinctly aware of his real feelings, and when that day came she would

speak. So long as he continued silent, and their relations rested in that pleasant intellectual friendship which was so charming that she was loath to give it up, why should she drag into this dream life the cruel realities which had given her such pain?

She did not say "why disenchant Lucien?" but in spite of herself that was what was in her thoughts. She thought in particular that he would suffer, and it was pity for the grief that he would feel on her account even more than fear of losing his esteem that had sealed her lips.

Now he was there before her eyes, consumed and tortured by this grief. Some one else had not shrunk from revealing to the young man the secret which she had not dared to confess, but which she had made up her mind not to deny if Lucien really had any suspicion. His tears were too conclusive. He did not suspect: he knew but refused to believe. His first words, when at length he recovered sufficient energy to articulate, showed how indignant he was at the charge, but Bertha did not for a moment entertain the idea of taking advantage of his indignation. Better than any long analysis of motive this fact will go to establish the girl's fundamental honesty. Victim as she was of the most detestable of the sophistries that are current in the poisoned atmosphere of the new-born twentieth century, the depravation of her intellect had not extended to her emotions.

At last he said: "You will forgive me," and he wiped his eyes and drew his hand across his forehead as if to banish some nightmare. "It is unmanly. My nerves have betrayed me—I am master of them again and can answer you at last and explain the reason of my present state. But first I must have your promise. Whatever I may say, will you undertake to pardon me?"

"I know you too well, Lucien," she replied gently, "to imagine you will ever say a word you ought not to say or anything which I could resent."

The reply was evasive, and he hesitated. The enormity of the accusation he was going to repeat struck him as so monstrous that he persisted: "That is not enough for me, I want a distinct promise or I shall not have the strength. And yet you must know it. For my sake and your own you must. Promise me you will forgive me."

"Yes," said she, "I promise."

"Thank you," he replied, and abruptly asked, "Do you know of any enemies you have, Bertha?"

"I?" said she, while a flush of colour mantled her cheeks. Her thoughts flew to her one and only enemy, that unclean parasite of the woman's-rights movement, Méjan, who had seduced her in circumstances which constituted a disgraceful abuse of confidence. He had thrown her over directly she became *enceinte*. Whenever she now met him in the street, she felt such a stab at her heart that she thought she would faint. They

did not acknowledge one another, but what a boastful look he threw after her. Beyond a doubt it was Méjan. He had either spoken to Lucien or contrived to let him know. The idea was peculiarly painful to Bertha, and yet like the hospital-patient whose remark she had admired, it did her good to know the worst. So she was quite calm with stoic resignation as she went on: "I do not know any one whom I can really call my enemy. Besides, I should have more right to call myself his enemy than him mine. But where you utterly despise there is no room for hate. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have just learnt that you are the object of a foul slander," replied Lucien. "Probably it was started by this person. I must know. It is a dishonour which would affect the whole of your future if we were not to take immediate action."

"What can they do to me?" she replied, shrugging her slender shoulders, and in her eyes began to sparkle the glitter of pride developing into symptoms of indignation.

"What the person in question can say or think about me is quite indifferent to me. He or she will not prevent me from passing my examinations and gaining my livelihood by the care of patients when I have my doctor's degree. I ask no more from society; my friends may see how I live and judge me accordingly."

"It is just because they do judge you," cried the young man, "and because they know what you are,

that they will not and cannot pass over these scandalous stories that you despise. You must help them to kill the slander for their sakes if not for your own. Would you allow any one to insinuate in your presence that I was a thief?"

"What am I accused of," broke in Bertha, "that can be compared to a theft?" She threw a touch of bitterness into her voice as she put the question. In Lucien's tone and in the still mysterious terms which he employed, but which had no mystery for her, she recognised a line of thought against which her pride had been in rebellion these four years past. In spite of their views on the impostures of the Church and the iniquities of the Code, that radical republican her uncle, and the old socialist Professor her master, M. André, had looked on her as dishonoured because she had given way to passion without the sanction of the marriage ceremony, because in fact she had deliberately ignored the Church, the mother of lies, and the Code which encouraged crime. They had condemned her, and why? Because she had had the courage of their ideas; and she now heard the same decree of ostracism pronounced with unconscious brutality by the man with whom she was so much in love.

"Ah!" he groaned. "It is worse than that. You are accused—but no, my lips refuse to frame the horrible words." Then he continued savagely, and each word tore his heart and made it bleed, though he found some

comfort in the intensity of his pain which was evidence of the strength of his love: "You are accused of having left Clermont and gone away from your uncle's home with a lover, and having lived with him and had a child by him. He was a law-student, so they say, and his name was Méjan. You were studying law yourself in those days, it is said. They add that a quarrel ensued, and you changed your profession in order not to meet this man any more. I am telling you all: my stepfather repeated all these slanders to me not two hours ago. How did he learn that we saw a good deal of each other? I do not know at all. I have never spoken of you at home or elsewhere. But learn he did. Our relations have made him uneasy. For that I cannot blame him. What I shall never forgive him for, as long as I live, is for giving your name to some interfering agent who has retailed these foul stories to him. What despicable inquiries have been made and from whom I cannot say. But you suspect some one, so tell me his name and we will go together or I alone as your friend. If we discover nothing in this direction, I will know who this agent is. I will force him to confess where he picked up all this mud to throw at you. Any and every means will be justifiable. But I mean to have justice done you, I mean to make my stepfather say: 'I ask Mlle. Planat's pardon for what I have repeated about her.' Till then I will not see him again."

Bertha had kept her eyelids lowered so as not to see

Lucien when he was talking in this strain. His words went to her heart like a stab, she felt his distress and was tortured herself by the memories he awakened which touched the inmost fibres of her being. His exalted belief in her moved the affectionate side of her nature strongly and at the same time drove her to despair. It formed a convincing proof of a passion which suspicion had not been able to nip in the bud. But she was also swayed by another feeling. Emancipated herself, she was conscious of confirmed and growing resentment against the social prejudice which had even crept into the words in which this man, who loved her as much as she loved him, declared his refusal to believe in her guilt. . . . So her first sentence, when Lucien stopped in the middle of his threats against his stepfather, was somewhat deprecatory, a rejection of assistance and an acceptance of full personal responsibility. She would have no mention of excuse or pardon.

“I thank you for the friendship which you show me,” said she, “but I cannot share your indignation with your stepfather. He does not know me and he has had facts brought to his notice on which he had every right to put the interpretation he has put. Your candour towards me demands equal frankness on my part. One of these facts is incorrect: M. Méjan was not my lover when I left Clermont. On the other hand, it is perfectly true that I lived with him in Paris during the first year of my course, perfectly true that I had a child, per-

fectly true that I had begun the study of law and that I decided to take up medicine chiefly in order to make a fresh start in life. On these three points your step-father has been correctly informed."

"You? You?" The simple monosyllable, uttered in agonised tones, was the only reply that this confession, terrible in its brevity, drew from the young man. His look expressed stupefaction bordering on insanity. The tears were dried in his eyes. He had drawn back as if to escape a harrowing vision. Lower again came the hoarse cry: "You did this? You! You!"

"Yes, I!" she replied, her brow erect, and her arms crossed in an attitude of defiance. "And if there is anything I reproach myself with, it is not that I acted as I did. I had the right so to act, and my conscience tells me I failed in nothing that was due to myself. But what I tell you to-day, I ought, it is true, to have told you on the first day when our friendship began. I shrank from it. Not because of what I had done. No, not because of what I had done."

"Why did you not then still keep silence?" he cried sorrowfully. "Ah! You should have had the charity to continue the illusion when you had once created it. So, all that I thought of you was a lie? All the admiration, the respect, the worship I paid you, all was madness? You have had a lover?" He repeated the word with more exasperation: "A lover! The thought makes me sick, it makes me sick. Why did you not deny it

just now, in face of all the evidence? I should not have doubted your word. As it is, to-morrow and the next day and always I shall have to say that you were that man's mistress. Whom shall I ever believe in now? Whom indeed? I had such faith in you."

"Be silent, Lucien," she broke in, walking up to him and seizing his arm, "I forbid you to speak to me so," and there was such an expression of indignant resentment in her eyes that he obeyed instinctively, and listened in silence though jealousy was gnawing at his heart as she went on: "You have no right to speak so, you who have watched my life these many days, and known my thoughts, my work, my feelings. Have you ever known me insincere? No. Have I said a word, have I made a gesture not in keeping with our compact of friendship, the companionship of one student with another, which I sketched the second time we talked together? I remember that moment so well! I was so drawn to you and so determined not to see you again, in case you should try to woo me. Have I let you do so? And all these proofs of my loyalty, all this evidence, which you cannot however doubt, that I have character, intellect, conscience,—all is to go for nothing. You do not even do me the credit to say to yourself: this woman who speaks to me and recognises her responsibility for certain acts, is still the same woman whom a moment ago I esteemed so highly as to refuse to believe her guilty of these acts in spite of overwhelming evidence. It must be that

these acts did not, do not, mean to her what I thought they meant. Ah! well, yes, I did it all. I gave myself to a man. I became a mother though unmarried, and I did not think I had failed in my duty. I do not think so at the present moment even. Act as you think: that is my one principle, and even in those days, nay, in those days more than ever, I acted only as I thought."

"That is untrue," replied the young man sternly. "You did not think it right for a young girl to be false to her honour."

"I thought," returned she, with equal sternness, "and I still think that a man and a woman to be engaged to one another and to set up a home have no need of a priest to give his blessing or of a magistrate to register their engagement.

"I thought and I think still that true marriage consists in the free union of two persons who join their destinies by their individual choice, with no other witness of their promise than their own consciences. I still think, as I thought then, that a woman no more loses her honour by having contracted such a tie and having found herself deceived, than if she had been married at church and a registry office to some wretch who first betrayed and then deserted her. That is why I could weep tears of blood when I think of the man whom you mentioned just now and who treated me so shamefully. They would not be tears of remorse. I have no call to feel remorse, and I feel none. None, I say. Let me con-

tinue," she urged, as he made a protesting gesture. "No doubt this is the last interview we shall have together; I want you at least to judge me on what happened and just as it happened. I first knew M. Méjan," the bitter pang of hearing that name previously had made her shut her eyes and she shut them once more to pronounce it—"at Clermont, when he was reading for his licentiate in philosophy. I met him at the house of M. André. I do not seek to excuse myself. To be deceived in some one's character is like a mistake in a diagnosis. You are not responsible for it. But I am entitled to say that if I was mistaken in the man, so was M. André, and he was eighty years old and an old university don who had had thousands of young men through his hands. So too was my uncle, and he was a seasoned legal official and was not suspected of optimistic views of human nature. Now that my medical studies have opened my eyes to things as they are, I understand what I could not see then any more than my uncle or M. André: the man's intelligence was merely of the superficial order. His eloquence was not nourished on thought and truth. Yet eloquence he had, and great eloquence, and he put it at the service of beliefs which were mine and those of my two instructors. He wrote, and with ability. You have always lived in Paris; you do not know how seldom in the provinces the opportunity occurs for real intellectual talk and how eagerly it is embraced. You do not know either how strong

there, even at the present day, are the prejudices of the old social order, and to what isolation people are condemned who, like my uncle, venture to profess Collectivism in its entirety, and to bring up a ward, as he brought me up, without religious education. M. André had not gone beyond his Fourierism of the year 1847. For myself I took a little from one, and a little from the other. In our stranded and backward corner of the world, we yet felt ourselves carried away by this vast wave which is to sweep away the old abominable order of things. Imagine what it meant to us all, the appearance on the scene of this young man who seemed to have such a glorious future before him, to whom his masters pointed as their most brilliant pupil, and who declaimed to us the most modern theories of the Revolution with an enthusiasm which won our hearts. Before obtaining his scholarship at the University of Clermont, Méjan had been for a year a teacher at Brussels. There he had visited Élisée Réclus. The mention of this name invested him with a prestige which was increased by the warmth of the language in which he pictured for us the society of to-morrow, composed of men and women so fully penetrated with the principles of justice that all legislation would be unnecessary.

“He showed us the mind emancipated by Science and the destruction of Dogma, poverty cured by the abolition of private property, the substitution of one solid federation of the world for the narrow egotism of the father-

land, the vileness of matrimonial traffic succeeded by the simplicity of free union. My misfortunes began in those little lodgings in the rue de l'Eclache where I grew up and where that hypocrite expatiated on these ideas. I believed in him because I believed in liberal ideas. Was I to blame? Tell me." But she did not wait for the reply, so constraining was her need to carry her confession to the end and be quit of it; instead she continued, and once more her voice had a somewhat unnatural ring:

"However, when I left Clermont, there was nothing between that man and me but my admiration for him and my belief in the insincere mummery of his professions. Those who said that I came to Paris to follow him lied. I went there to study law, for I wanted to become a barrister and then take to writing. There was a further reason. I will tell you. I am open with you as you were with me. My uncle had lived, during my childhood, with a woman servant as his mistress. He married her. This woman had not been fond of me when I was quite small; now she hated me. Paris was the final outcome of many extremely painful domestic scenes. Besides, I was of age, I had my own little fortune, and a touching confidence in life. A legacy chanced to come his way, and Méjan planted himself in the Quartier Latin a few weeks after me, also with the view of studying law and afterwards going in for politics. We met again. He paid me great attention.

I was so lonely, such a stranger in this great city, so out of my element among those students in spite of my certificates, and that man knew me so well. He persuaded me that he loved me. Was I to blame for that, again? Was I to blame for thinking he was sincere when he offered to unite his life with mine for once and for all, so that we might work together for the same end, practise the same revolutionary faith, set up a home as we conceived it? When I went to live with him, I mounted the staircase with all the sincerity of a Catholic bride as she crosses the threshold of the church, all the seriousness of the tradesman's daughter as she enters the registrar's office. It was marriage as I understood it, marriage as Proudhon nobly described it, an act of organised justice. We brought to it, I thought we brought to it, that scoundrel and I, equal willingness to love and be loved, equal conviction of the seriousness of our compact, equal respect the one for the other. Five months later he had deserted me to live with some girl in the Quartier and I was *enceinte*. Dare to tell me again that it was I who was dishonourable! Dare to tell me that I lied to you, that I do not deserve to be trusted again, that you were mad to respect me. Say so, if you dare!"

To certain confessions which go as far as any human being can go in baring the inmost soul, there is imparted such a convincing air of reality as forbids further discussion. While Bertha spoke Lucien came under

this convincing power and he made no effort to resist. There was no doubt in his mind that the girl had told him her real feelings, that the miserable episode had taken place exactly as she had stated, and that she had passed through her gloomy experience as she had said in all good faith despite her fall. In face of this evidence his previous indignation sank into an overwhelming fit of sadness which increased with every detail furnished by his fellow student. While she was speaking, he could see her as she had been in her narrow provincial circle, between her two teachers, intoxicating herself with theories too powerful for her, and, young as she was, already possessed of her fine enthusiastic outlook on the world without that background of melancholy which he had always recognised and which was now explained. He saw her arrival in Paris and her first troubles. Had he only met her then, instead of the libertine whose detestable methods he knew too well. He could see the influence he exerted over a defenceless orphan girl by means of that exalted state of her mind which should have made her sacred. How he would himself have shielded, strengthened, and sustained her! Light was thrown at last on all sorts of shades in her character which he had been conscious of without understanding, the energy, for instance, with which she applied herself to her medical studies in their dryest and most difficult departments. It was her effort to escape from her old predilections for eloquence and literature, and

their fatal fascinations which had proved so treacherous. The whole story formed so sad an episode in a woman's life, the contrast between her utopian dreams and the misery of her actual experience was so cruel, that he was cut to the heart. She had no need to defy him to speak again in the tone he had used before. He was too full of pity for her, and at her "Say so, if you dare," repeated with passion verging on frenzy, he replied submissively:

"No, I do not say so any more. I cannot judge you. I believe you. All you tell me proves to me that I was wrong to give way to my feelings just now, instead of waiting for your explanation. But the shock was so severe. I do not accuse you any more. I do not condemn you. I grieve to know what I do know now. It is like a weight crushing me. If only you had spoken to me the first day I knew you, you or some one else. No, you alone—I should not have believed any one but you. I should still have been very unhappy, but not so much as now. . . ."

"Ah," she groaned, "I should have lost you sooner. That is what always stopped me. I was so fearful of finding in you as I found in my uncle and M. André that loss of esteem against which I rebelled. To what end? I was a coward. But your friendship was so dear to me. There were so many points in which we felt and thought alike. Sometimes I said to myself: Some day he will feel and think with me on this subject also.

And then . . .” She shook her head without completing this enigmatic sentence, as if to banish the vision of happiness which returned to tempt her. “At other times,” she went on, “I saw distinctly where we were drifting. I saw the precipice. We have reached it. But the road was too pleasant. It was an oasis in my horrible desert, and now I must make up my mind to go back. Good-bye, Lucien; I have told you all I had to tell. The explanation has exhausted me. I do not feel well. Leave me. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” replied the young man. He took his hat and stepped to the door. With his hand on the door-handle, he stood some seconds without moving. Then he turned and came back to her: “I cannot,” he said, “leave you thus, I cannot go after the words you have just used which mean that you consider our intimacy at an end. No! I cannot.” There was a momentary hesitation, and then he took her hand which she had not strength to withdraw, and in a voice which trembled with passion and sorrow he added: “I cannot do it, Bertha, for I love you.” She heard him, with head cast down and eyes fixed on the ground. Suddenly her sight failed, deep pallor overspread her face, and her features were distorted. He felt the feverish little hand in his own become icy cold. He had just time to take her in his arms to sustain her. She fainted away, and the sudden heart-failure betrayed more clearly than any avowal the intensity of her feeling and

the secret of her love. The young man carried her to the narrow cretonne-covered bench and kneeling by her began to call her by her name with a feeling of terror which subsided into passionate tenderness when she opened her eyes, and with a glance at him, instead of withdrawing her head which rested on his arm, moved closer to his shoulder as if to seek there support, refuge, protection.

"Bertha," he ventured to entreat her, "this is a solemn moment. If you love me too, tell me so. Do you love me?" he repeated. "Do you love me?"

"Yes," she whispered in so feeble a voice that he read the words on her trembling lips rather than heard them. His own heart was beating so fast that he had no breath to speak. Still on his knees, he gazed at that delicious face to which his fancy had so often strayed; at the thin cheeks whose too delicate outline had constantly made him uneasy; at the brow which he had so often watched bending over dry volumes, such as loaded the table a few steps away, in which she found forgetfulness; at those prettily cut lips, the lower one ever so little swollen. Those lips, so frequently opened for remarks of such sternness as to contrast oddly with their beauty, now gave utterance first to the most poignant lamentation and then to the very softest sigh of self-abandonment in which the soul of woman can give her secret away. Suffering as he still was from the terrible minutes he had just passed through, the young man felt

the ground giving way under him in an intoxicating whirl in which all else was swept aside, and she was alone with him and he with her, with this frail child to whose laboured breath he listened, alone with the ecstasy of passion which she called up, alone with her eyes and his love. They were so beautiful, those eyes, so tired, so wan, that without a thought he bent over to close them with a kiss. He imprinted a kiss on their palpitating lashes. But his excitement grew and his lips sought the girl's. At the touch, though light as air, she cried out. In a moment she raised herself, with terror speaking in every feature. She had not to repulse him. He too had risen, as pale as she. The same thought had come to them both. For a moment they looked at one another without a word, though they knew too well, both he and she, what vision had come to part them. At last she said:

"You see I was right and this interview must be our last. Go, Lucien, for pity's sake go, if you would not have me die of sorrow and shame before you."

And such distress was apparent in her whole person, face, attitude, gestures, and voice, that this time the young man obeyed and went from the room to fly from her and from himself, and from the recollection of that other whose image had so abruptly thrust itself between their first embrace of love and desire.

CHAPTER V

BETROTHAL

DURING the four years that had elapsed since she first came to occupy that solitary room in the rue Rollin, Bertha Planat had experienced many hours of bitter self-communing, but none sadder than those which followed that frenzied and feverish scene begun in such sanguine trust on Lucien's part, continued by her indignant protest, and suddenly ended by that outburst of passionate tenderness in one of those abrupt, unreasoning changes of mood in which the uncontrollable passion of love manifests itself. At first there was utter prostration, lasting all the evening and throughout the night, such as accompanies a sudden and appalling accident, sure prelude of others still more terrible. Long after the young man had closed the door behind him she was still there, seated on the very chair where she was working with such an unfettered mind when he arrived. Her head resting on her hands and her elbows on the table, she had ceased to look at her hospital notebook, the Atlas of Anatomy, the fragments of skeleton, tools of her severe and arduous study. And yet she had found in this work an anodyne to so many sorrows—

but oh! not for this, not for this despair which kept on increasing as the darkness crept into the room. The darkness that overclouded her heart was more sinister still. It was not so much having confessed the baneful adventure of her youth, her *liaison* with Méjan, and the rest, which broke her spirit. Although she had always trembled at the idea of such a confession she had always foreseen it, but as an entirely voluntary act, at a moment chosen by herself, with sufficient time for a minutely detailed explanation of a position so exceptional in its character and so closely bound up with the whole story of her life. Instead of that, taken by surprise, upset, distracted, she could only stammer out an incoherent tale, a lamentation rather than a confession. What must Lucien have thought of it? Above all how could he help despising her for that other confession, the confession of her new love, which in the transport of her emotion she had been unable to withhold? She felt the stings of remorse for having had that moment of weakness, for having uttered the irrevocable yes, laid her head on the young man's shoulder, received the kisses implanted on her eyes and lips. She had torn herself away, but too late, and when that burning caress had fired her blood with a passion that to her was unmistakable. She was at Lucien's mercy. In an hour perhaps, on the morrow, he would return. She would see him once more at her feet, mad with passion, coming near her, enrapturing her with his look, his

breath, his touch. She would resist a second time, a third, but only yield at last. And then she would no longer be the woman she had prided herself on being since her rupture with Méjan, the woman who is entitled to regard an irregular union as a marriage because it is monogamous. She would be the girl who had had two lovers. Ancient moral truths are in such close harmony with the inner needs of our nature that honest minds perforce bear witness to them even when they deny them. To preserve her self-respect, this theorist of free union had felt the necessity of practising that fidelity, even when fully justified in living apart from her lover, which the Church imposes on the Christian wife. The anticipation of shortcoming in this respect filled her with shame—a word which had sprung up, for the first time, from the depths of a heart in revolt, after that moment of weakness, passing though it was and attended by no irretrievable consequences. What would it have been if she had yielded utterly? This feeling of shame redoubled by anticipation as she conjured up the sentiments which Lucien would feel in her presence, nay, which he must already feel. In the course of her medical studies she had made a point, as if in spiteful revenge for the deception of her former dreams, of reading all the books in which the effects of love are treated from an exclusively pathological standpoint. She knew that, by a dreadful law of masculine sensuality, jealousy acts on certain men by producing

impure and distracting images. She shuddered as she wondered whether the sudden frenzy in Lucien's eyes, until then filled with a timid, a devout adoration, had not been caused by his discovery that she had already belonged to another. Was it not also hatred, that ignoble and inseparable companion of a degraded sensuality, which was seen in his look and gestures when he had fled without a word? If, at the outset and as soon as he learned the facts, he had shown towards her, instinctively, brutally, such contempt in the midst of his desire, he would show it still more bitterly, with still more venom and justly so, in actual possession. She would deserve this because she had been a coward. She repeated the word to herself: "a coward! a coward!" She could no longer pride herself, as she had boldly done that very day, on having lived a life outside the pale of the law with equal if not greater self-respect than if she had submitted to the most rigid conventions of society. And then what future would be in store for them?

She had not gone out to dine through fear of meeting Lucien, so great was her dread of facing another ordeal in which she might succumb. During that long night she did not dare to light her lamp, lest he should come up to her door at any time and, seeing a light, knock and entreat her to open. Lying undressed in that dark, cold room, on the little couch where her friend had laid her when she fainted, she at length found a somewhat

tardy and feverish sleep. When she awoke about six o'clock, as she was accustomed to do in her uniformly regulated existence, her anguish of the previous evening was still the same, with this difference, however, that a new plan was taking shape in her mind. New? No. Often previously when meeting Méjan too frequently in the streets of the Latin Quarter and when the seducer seemed as if he meant to speak, she had foreseen escaping the nightmare of her past life by going away, by leaving Paris, by changing her University. Her pride had always prevented her. It was Méjan who should have blushed in her presence and avoided her. But now it was no mere question of her own pride and of defying a scoundrel. Was the precious companionship of the past year to find shipwreck in a *liaison*, which in her own and in Lucien's eyes would be a fall with all its consequent degradation? Or could she still retain in the young man's memory that place of esteem to which she was entitled? To leave thus, after having maintained their relations on that lofty plane throughout their intercourse, what more indisputable proof could she give of her sincerity? Lucien would be obliged to admit that she was no woman of easy virtue who takes one lover after another. He had seen that she loved him. He would understand that she had wished *not* to become his mistress, for the simple reason that she loved him. As she outlined in her imagination this romance of flight from the man she adored, her anguish of the

previous evening was lost in the feeling of utter resignation which accompanies supreme sacrifices. Gradually, the project took a more definite shape, names were mentioned in her unspoken monologue: Nancy, Montpellier. The former of these Universities attracted her by the novel character of its research-work in Psychology. Among the professors in the other was the famous house-physician of St. Élois, the author of the *Limitations of Biology*, whose principles, so opposed to her own, had always excited and fascinated her curiosity. She pictured herself arriving in one or other of these two towns, which she imagined, from recollections of Clermont and her native place, would have deserted squares and grass growing in the streets and alleys. To those who knew her she would at first be an object of astonishment as the only female student, then of malevolence, when little Claude's existence was found out. We can guess after what famous physiologist the child was named. What were these paltry difficulties, however, compared to the torture of seeing Lucien despise her even in his arms. This picture brought her reflections to a full stop, and she felt that her decision was made. Yes, she would go away and without delay. If she really wished to escape a fall of which she felt both the horror and the fatal attraction, their conversation of the previous night must, as she had said, be the last. Why not disappear that very day, leaving some one to look after the removal of her property, the porter's

wife for instance, who acted as her charwoman? She would return in a month to take away her furniture when Lucien would think she had gone away for good. . . . Where? . . . She would manage in such a way that he should not know. What would he do then? Her whole will was brought into play to avoid putting this question to herself. Her strength could not have borne the strain. Having decided not to let the day pass without adopting a definite plan, she had energy enough to act at once. There was in the service of Professor Louvet at the Hôtel-Dieu a house-surgeon who was a native of Montpellier. She reflected that he would certainly be present at the operation which Graux, the surgeon, was to attempt on patient No. 32, whose stoical words she had repeated to Lucien. She little thought they would so soon be applicable to herself. And she prepared to go to the hospital as usual. Her heart beat as if it would break, in spite of all her reasoning, when she passed in front of the porter's lodge. Would she find in the pigeon-hole reserved for her an envelope with Lucien's handwriting? Was he not waiting in person at the top of the steps in the rue Monge, which she always took to reach the Place Notre Dame by way of the Place Maubert and the bridge? There was no letter in the pigeon-hole. Lucien was not in the street. She was safe for that morning.

This discovery after her recent reflections should have calmed her anxiety somewhat. But it did not. By an

illogical but only too legitimate train of thought the loving woman secretly expected and desired the dangerous presence, which the rational part of her nature feared to the extent of suggesting the plan of perpetual exile. After refusing to put to herself the question: What would Lucien do? she suddenly wondered why he had done nothing and why he had not come near her after parting as they did. When once the idea entered her mind it never ceased to lacerate like a dart which at every movement buries itself deeper in the wound. She took one by one, with that punctuality which was a prominent feature of her character, the several steps she had prescribed for herself, such as going to Professor Louvet's lecture by the usual route, at the exact time, speaking to the house-surgeon from Montpellier, questioning him, as if on behalf of a friend, about the way of living in his part of the country. These acts were indeed external and prearranged. Her thoughts were far away. A sinister supposition had just crossed her mind amid many others. A man in love driven to suicide through despair at a sudden discovery is an everyday occurrence. What if, on leaving her, overcome with grief at her confession, unable to bear what he had learnt or the heaviness of his own heart, Lucien had committed suicide! She imagined she saw him covered with blood, lying in the middle of a room, holding in his clenched hand the pistol he usually carried for his return at night through the unfrequented

neighbourhood of the Luxembourg. In vain did she argue the impossibility of such a catastrophe: that Lucien would certainly have written before he died, and that no one commits suicide knowing that he is loved. It was in profound anguish of mind, as in a waking dream, that she followed the different stages of the amputation of which she had so conscientiously studied the anatomical details the previous evening. With the same anguish of mind, at the conclusion of the lecture, she turned her face towards the little restaurant in the rue Racine. In carrying out consistently the resolutions she had made, she should have avoided it that morning as well as the previous evening. On the contrary, she hurried thither in hope that Lucien had come to resume the conversation which she now feared had really been the last. Lucien had not come. And now on returning home to the rue Rollin to see whether a letter had not arrived in her absence, the hall-porter's wife informed her that a visitor had called that morning to enquire whether M. de Chambault was not upstairs.

“A man of about fifty years of age, quite grey, of very gentlemanly appearance, wearing a decoration.”

Bertha concluded from the description that it was the stepfather who had come to see Lucien there—Lucien had not returned home then? As the thought flashed through her mind, this absence from the maternal roof seemed to the unhappy woman a proof of the

worst. But still she hoped. Her power of recognising facts, a power she gratefully attributed to her studies, enabled her to reason thus: "Lucien's mother would certainly have received a letter from him. He has not committed suicide. He is suffering. He has avoided seeing his stepfather because he cannot defend me before him. He has hidden himself somewhere to eat out his heart. To-morrow or the day after he will come back. I must be away."

That power of will which persisted, as if automatically, amid all this cruel vexation of spirit, led her that afternoon to take a very simple step. To her great surprise she was to find in it an imperious reason for not going away, and the striking proof that her morning terror had been one of those semi-hallucinations familiar in love affairs. Love borders on insanity when fear comes in. Incapable of bearing the idea of the slightest danger threatening the loved one, it sees, creates, that danger at the smallest sign, however vague and transient. That step was a visit to Moret. If she left Paris next day—it was no longer a question of leaving the same day—she must have an understanding with the people who had charge of her boy. Usually she paid this visit every Sunday, and after making Lucien's acquaintance each absence from Paris had been a torture. Their existence being almost in common the young man might well be astonished at seeing her disappear regularly one afternoon each week, obliged as she was to take a

train at two o'clock to reach Moret by four and be back at eight.

Motherhood associated with the remembrance of the contemptible seducer by whom she had conceived was an open wound in that proud heart. Refined natures, such as hers, are no more content with the purely instinctive passion of motherhood than with the purely instinctive passion of love. The primitive sensations must be enriched, embellished, dignified even, before they can satisfy them, and this they can only find in family-life. Outside the family a woman is not completely a mother, and the family cannot exist outside certain conditions which are part and parcel of nature herself. These depend neither on written laws nor on the caprices of the intellect. They exist outside us and if we misconceive them, are hostile to us. Bertha had misconceived them. That is why she was unable to take pleasure in a son whom nevertheless she loved and towards whom she felt a great responsibility. He had not asked to come into the world, and in a society founded on principles which she thought harsh, he had only her to look to. Such were the reflections generally associated with the little grey town, standing peacefully on the banks of its sluggish river, in the shadow of its ancient cathedral, with its long central street closed at either end by gateways of the time of Charles VII. This time, as she left the train, her heart was too heavy to think of anything but the sinister possibility of her friend's

suicide, or, if that affliction was spared her, of the anguish that would follow her departure, and of which she felt the first bitterness in this visit to Moret. It was with feelings of tortured resignation that she entered the little house standing picturesquely against a ruined rampart with a kitchen garden opening onto a meadow, where her son lived. The owners of this cottage, M. and Mme. Bonnet, were retired servants who had taken a liking to the child through seeing it with its wet-nurse, their neighbour. This woman having been obliged to leave Moret, the mother had asked them to take charge of him. They had accepted without any allusion being made on either side to the secret of the little one's birth. They spoke and wrote to Bertha as Madame from a feeling of middle-class respectability, to which the advocate of free union had not ventured to make any objection. What did they think of her history? She had often wondered when she met the dully scrutinising gaze cast upon her by the quondam valet and cook. But what did it matter? These people were kind to the boy who was a distraction to them in their lonely life, whilst the small sum paid for his board was a welcome addition to their scanty budget. This afternoon she found them busy, the husband among his vegetables, the wife with her washing, while Claude was playing on the path with an enormous house-dog which put up good-naturedly with his teasing. The laughing boy, his fair hair mingled with the dog's tawny coat, the

docile suppleness of the animal and the nimbleness of his playful tyrant made up a perfect little picture of home life in strong contrast with the scene which the mother had gone through the previous evening. As the child sprang forward to meet her with joy in his blue eyes, so cruelly like those of the wretched Méjan, his thoughtless peals of merriment brought on an overwhelming feeling of melancholy which suddenly changed to intense emotion when she heard Madame Bonnet say with the expression in voice and face of a woman who can no longer restrain her curiosity:

"Claude has been spoiled to-day. A friend of yours came to see him this morning."

"A friend?" she repeated.

"A M. de Chambault," added the husband. That flood of red which rose to her cheeks fully persuaded the ex-valet that he and his wife had guessed rightly. The visitor was the boy's father. "He gave us his name," he continued, "and told us he came from Madame Planat. We did not think we could refuse to let him kiss the child."

"And he did kiss him," added the wife with significant emphasis. "Ah, he is certainly fond of him. There were tears in his eyes." Lucien had wished to see the child! He had spoken to him! He had kissed him! Amazing and wholly unexpected fact! Bertha was too weak to feel relief at the removal of her grievous anxiety, so thunderstruck was she by the news. The way in

which the Bonnets, both husband and wife, scanned her face for the effect of their words gave her strength enough to hide the violent agitation of her mind. The idea that the most intimate secret of her life formed the subject of their conversation was unbearable to her. They were not persons to make capital out of this knowledge, but there was always in their attitude, particularly so at that moment, that tone of semicomplacency so common among the domestic classes accustomed to screen the vices of their masters. Even at that moment of intense emotion she was conscious of what had so often made the necessity of bringing up her son in this way painful to her. She had had no choice.

She had the courage to answer that M. de Chambault was certainly one of her friends and that they were right in having allowed him to see the child, and then began to speak of her possible departure and in that case of the date when she would take the child away. In speaking thus after what she had just learnt, she well knew that she, the dogmatic advocate of uncompromising sincerity, was not candid. Her pride led her to persist in the decision to break with Lucien finally and completely, but though she persisted she no longer believed in her resolution.

An inner voice which she made no attempt to silence told her unmistakably that Lucien's opinion of her was not what she had fancied. Now that she knew of his visit, she could not leave him as she had intended, nor

would he allow her to go away without seeing her and speaking to her again. What stronger witness could there be to a change of heart which must even now be leading him back to her, than this vision of his arrival in the remote little town in search of the boy whose suddenly revealed existence had drawn from him a cry of such poignant anguish, than the thought of their meeting and tearful embrace. She was sure that on his return to Paris he would try to see her, sure that he had written to her. In her case, too, the news of that visit had changed her feelings. She had only one thought now, to return to the rue Rollin to meet Lucien and have an explanation. She was certain that a letter awaited her. What had become of her heroic determination to seek exile? But was she really inconsistent? The man she had resolved to fly from was the lover, burning with jealousy, excited by desire and rancour, filled with hate even when overmastered by passion. It was not the lover capable of the loving tender-heartedness shown in that kiss implanted on the brow of another's son. But indeed it was little she thought of arguing out the question. She was again the woman who had seen the abyss yawning before her for six months, and yet had been unable to leave the pleasant path which led to it. When, on reaching home at eight o'clock feverishly excited by fresh expectations, she saw in the pigeon-hole the envelope she had vainly sought in the morning and at midday, she felt it would be impossible to re-

fuse to grant whatever request it might contain. It was a note of but few words:—"Bertha, I must have a word with you. On your way to the hospital, be at Les Arènes at nine o'clock. I shall wait for you there. My whole life depends on the request I have to make, and I tremble at the thought. Your friend, L."

The little square known as *Les Arènes* which the lover chose for the rendezvous, is at that early hour one of the most solitary spots in Paris. It owes its name to a few seats of a Roman Arena laid bare by recent excavations and thoroughly restored, around which turfed slopes have been laid out and trees planted. The spot is separated by an iron railing from the rue de Navarre, the name given to what was formerly a part of the rue Rollin until the latter was cut in two by the broad artery of the rue Monge. Bertha Planat had therefore a very short distance to walk from her door to the square. Yet the three minutes seemed long to her when, after a night of struggle with contradictory emotions, she made her way to the secluded corner where a fresh and decisive scene was to be played in the drama of her destiny. Until then, even in her compact with Méjan, she had controlled that destiny by the exercise of her will. Mistaken she might have been, terribly so, she had not been led away. But at this moment she was overmastered, tossed about, swept away by a great wave of passion which prevented her from seeing anything clearly. The woman in her had taken her revenge over

the feminist, the young girl over the student, the impulsive, loving, incomplete, and undecided creature whose weakness calls for virile support, over the haughty woman, confident in her own reason, who had childishly imagined she could defy the power of society by the mere force of individual action. When, after crossing the rue Monge, she saw Lucien pacing to and fro in front of the garden railings, her legs began to give way, and she thought she would be unable to cover the few yards which separated them. But he also had seen her. He came forward and spoke to her. At once, by his way of saluting her, by his face, by his voice when he spoke, by his look, she saw, with an emotion which in itself was happiness, that he trembled not less than she did. Above all, she felt that he had not changed. The man before her was no longer the listener in revolt, or despair, to her confession, no longer the man in a frenzy on his knees by her couch whose almost brutal kiss had frightened her. It was the friend of the last ten months, whose restrained ardour, whose fervent respect, she had loved so much. His face, usually so pensive, bore the traces of the inward struggle of the last two days. His pallor, the flash in his eyes, the dark lines beneath his eyes, showed what hours of feverish sleeplessness he had gone through. The thought of putting an end to it all forever, either by flight or by the tragic method so dreaded by Bertha, had certainly flashed through those dark eyes in whose depths one could now

divine a strange serenity. Evidently he knew what he wanted, and he wanted it after one of those self-examinations in which the whole being puts forth all its strength, never to go back again. What did he want? The importance of the words about to be exchanged was so great that, instinctively, they both kept silence at first as if to collect their thoughts. They walked side by side until they came to a seat placed in one of the clumps of shrubs. The branches were just beginning to show the first faint traces of buds; the sky was swept clear of the clouds of the preceding days; Spring was already smiling in the soft pale blue of heaven. The sun shone on the glistening box trees, and the breeze blew soft and warm among the pines whose evergreen branches contrasted with the budding bareness of the other trees. This feeling of revival enveloped these two young people, took possession of them, soothed their overwrought nerves. They had often come to that same spot during the previous summer and autumn, there they had talked and discussed, there in the interchange of abstruse philosophical opinions they had fondly thought to deceive the irresistible and simple instincts of their hearts. How far away was that recent past, for Bertha especially, who was now nothing save a lover hanging on the movements, the wishes, and the will of the one she loved. For Lucien was still, as he was about to prove even in that crisis of passion, the man of trained intellect accustomed to think and to act

systematically. Characters such as his, preserved from impulse, are capable of the most extraordinary and most romantic freaks when their theories happen to correspond with the involuntary movements of their instinct, and when they are able to discover transcendental reasons for obeying their natural desires.

"You went to Moret yesterday, Lucien," said Bertha, breaking a silence that was overcharged with thought. "I found it out when I went there yesterday after you."

"I wanted to make the acquaintance of your child," he answered: "it was a test I was anxious to impose upon myself before seeing you again. . . . Yes," he continued with some emphasis as she fixed an enquiring look on him, "when one is preparing to make a compact, one must be quite sure of one's ability to fulfil it, and, for that purpose, quite sure of having the necessary strength. I have certainly found out to my cost how weak I could be."

He was observing the young girl in his turn. She started. This enigmatical beginning had awakened in her an idea which had hardly entered her mind since their intercourse began. She passed over all in his words save the allusion to the terrible scene of two days before, so great was the pain this simple reminder caused her.

"Do not reproach yourself in any way," she said. "The fault was entirely mine. I should have spoken sooner."

“Dear, dear friend,” he said, taking her hand, “you were afraid to give me pain. Listen to me,” he went on, “what I have to say is in the last degree serious for me as well as for you, since you love me. For you do love me. I know it, I believe it. And I, after mature reflection, with complete control of my mind and heart, I must repeat to you what I confessed the day before yesterday in a moment of real aberration. I, also, love you, Bertha, passionately, solely. I love you. I have known it for a long time. How much and how deeply, I only knew the day before yesterday when you were speaking to me and afterwards during those hours I spent in going over your words one by one and in wringing out their meaning. There is not one of them that I have not weighed one by one, not one of your sentiments, not one of your principles, not one of your actions since I came to know you and before, that I have not scrutinised as if they belonged to a stranger, in the light that never deceives, the light of conscience. At the close of that scrutiny I discovered that I had never before loved and esteemed you so much. You were right when you said I was not to judge you unheard. I have heard you and I know that at no time have you ceased to be the one whose nobility of mind and elevation of ideas I admired so much from the very first. I know you are worthy of all the respect owed to a human being who has always respected herself. If in a first moment of aberration I spoke to you otherwise than I do now,

I ask you to pardon me. I was mad. I did not see, I see now. I did not understand, I understand now. You led me to look squarely at the marriage question of which I had never thought myself. Minds which believe themselves the freest have grooves in which they run without knowing it. I asked myself what was the essential significance of marriage, and have found no answer but yours: marriage is a contract between a man's conscience and a woman's conscience. What does the law add to this contract? Nothing, except guarantees. These guarantees do not increase the validity of the contract any more than a signature increases the validity of a debt. I have come to the conclusion that in entering upon the contract you made five years ago, without those guarantees but in perfect good faith, you acted in conformity with the eternal laws of righteousness. Your action was imprudent, dangerous for you. The result has proved this. Morally, it was of such a kind as to constitute an absolute rule, for free union as conceived by you is the ideal marriage, based only on the most intimate and deep-seated workings of the individual conscience. I wanted to tell you again and again that I esteem you, that I respect you as much as I love you. Do you believe me?"

"I think you have felt how sincere I was," she answered, "and I think you are very kind. I had so completely given up the idea of ever being judged from my point of view. I had become so accustomed to consider

myself alone in the world, absolutely alone in heart and mind. It is a somewhat too sudden change," she continued with a quivering smile, which almost betokened suffering. "It will be sweet for me to get accustomed to it. I tried to live outside all conventions; my sincerity only served to make me misjudged; it seemed a great injustice to me and I was profoundly unhappy, but now I am repaid and with interest."

"No," he said quickly, "you have not been repaid, yet you must," he repeated the words with great energy—"you must be repaid. What I think, others shall think, what I know they shall know. Listen, Bertha," he spoke in a tone of supplication, "what I have to ask you will seem strange after the declaration I have just made. Thinking as I now do on the marriage question I should, if strictly logical, come to you and say:—'You are free, I am free: will you try to live your life over again with me? Will you consent to that exchange of two promises in the name of two consciences, and found with me a home as we both understand it?' Yes, that is what I ought to say to you and it is my most ardent wish, my dearest dream, to be able to do so. But it is not my whole desire, I want something besides. Even if you lived with me in that way I should suffer, because I had not publicly repaired the injustice of which you complain. I should not have given you that visible proof of esteem I wish you to have. That proof will be given on the day we leave the registrar's office arm in

arm, you bearing my name, I having the right to protect you. I said that the legal marriage adds nothing to the real marriage, the marriage of consciences, except guarantees. Of these guarantees this is one:—In society as now constituted, when a man legally marries a woman, it is a public declaration that he has faith in her and that he allows no one to doubt her. You will not refuse me that satisfaction, Bertha. You will agree to marry me legally, to bear my name, to be my wife. It was to make this request that I begged you to come here. The request is made. I await your answer.”

She had listened to him in breathless agitation. As he uttered his final words, he saw her turn so deadly pale that he thought she was going to faint as before. He attempted to give her support. She gently pushed him away.

“Your wife?” she repeated. “You ask me to be your wife? Oh, how you must love me! How pleasant it is to feel it. What a salve on this aching wound. Your wife! No, Lucien. I must not be your wife. I must not marry you. It is impossible.”

“I had foreseen your objection,” he said. “You do not wish to give the lie to your past by giving up your principles regarding Free Union. You would be right if it were a question of a religious marriage. That does pervert the union of consciences as we understand it, since it supposes a third element, God. Civil marriage does not. It does nothing but register that union.

Civil marriage is only a free union attested by witnesses. Is submitting to a purely outward formality a disavowal of one's convictions?"

"I have got beyond that uncompromising attitude," replied Bertha, shaking her head disconsolately. "My stock of energy has been too much diminished. I am no longer rebellious. I am resigned. I am ready to submit to any social convention that does not interfere with my liberty of conscience, and it is true that the hackneyed ceremony prescribed by law and styled legal marriage, does not affect it. The obstacle to our marriage is not there. My child is the obstacle."

"There will be two to love him," he answered. "I wished to know whether I should be able to do so. That is why I went to Moret yesterday. Now I know I shall be able. Your child is not an obstacle, but a reason why you should accept my offer. He must have a protector and guide," he added, and his countenance betrayed the emotion caused by his own words—"a father. I shall be one to him."

"Oh," she sobbed, hiding her face in her hands. "You tempt me too strongly. You offer me happiness. But it is only a dream." And clasping her trembling hands together, she went on:—"It is not on my account, it is not on the child's account, that I must not marry you, it is on your own account. The change in your own conduct when you learnt my story is sufficient to show how society judges an unmarried girl who becomes

a mother. Your love, your sense of justice, your great intelligence have triumphed over that impression. The world will not be so well-disposed towards me. It has not been so. It has already condemned me through my uncle, through M. André, and through your step-father. Its condemnation would fall on you for having given me your name. All the obstacles encountered by the man who makes a fatal marriage would rise up against you. One despises these troubles, one braves them with a light heart for one's self. But one does not forgive one's self for inflicting them on others. To see you humiliated would be too hard for me to bear."

"Is it really you talking in this fashion?" he exclaimed. "You, that I have always known so brave, so independent, so proud. The world may turn against us and unite us in a common blame. Let it be so. We shall lean on each other and be sufficient for each other. For me at least you will be sufficient. Society humiliate me! I defy it. With our joint incomes we shall be independent. You know that during the last few months I have been more and more attracted by medicine. I shall devote myself entirely to that study. We will work together at science. I repeat your own words uttered the day before yesterday:—Who can prevent us from attending our patients if we wish to practise or, if we do not, from working in a laboratory? A man who seeks neither fortune nor honours needs not trouble about his career. Do not give that as a reason for

hesitating, Bertha, it would pain me too much. Besides"—he stopped a moment as if the words he was about to utter touched in him a bleeding chord, a flash of fiery suffering came into his eyes, and in an altered tone he repeated, "besides, to refuse me is to decide against our ever meeting again—Yes, either marry or separate, either my wife or nothing. Oh, do you not understand that if your life with me is to be possible it must be a new life?"

He said no more. The spectre of Méjan had suddenly risen up between them. Bertha had immediately interpreted that last obscure phrase in its real sense. It meant:—*I cannot live with you as the other did.* This unexpected and sudden reminder of an odious past at such a moment was so painful to both, that for some minutes they remained without speaking, as on their arrival: he greatly moved by the words he had just spoken, she still more crushed at seeing him suffering again and through her. Broken in spirit, she felt her resistance yielding before the passionate devotion of her friend. The morning March breezes continued to play around them, the sun still shone on Les Arènes. The ancient remnant of Roman Lutetia made an almost solemn setting to this strange contest between two children of the twentieth century who failed to grasp the silent lessons that were to be read in those last visible relics of a buried town. That ancient town was the foundation of the new town. Thus must ancestral cus-

tom serve as a durable and solid substructure for our transient destinies. The son of the divorced woman and the anarchist student professed exactly opposite principles. Yet reality, that great corrective of sophisms, which does not shape her eternal laws according to our reasoning, constrained these two revolutionary minds to seek their point of support at a critical moment in a fragment of traditional life, since it was marriage they were discussing and not free union. Lucien wished for marriage according to law—it was a last recess of his mind which he dared not explore after the statements he had made—to give a sanction to their love. For this, although she did not admit it even to herself, Bertha showed him a passionate gratitude which betrayed how much she still remained at heart a true daughter of her moral, conservative class in spite of an education which, totally opposed to all her hereditary tendencies, had paralysed without destroying them. When at length she turned to answer her tender-hearted, generous friend, she had inwardly given way. Yet a final scruple led her to say again:

“You speak as if there were only myself and society to think of, Lucien. There are the members of your family. I cannot separate you from them. How do you expect them ever to accept me when you know what your stepfather thinks of me?”

“My stepfather?” replied the young man—and his irritated tone showed that the painful discussion in the

Grand-Comptoir, two days before, still rankled in his mind. "No, I don't think my stepfather will oppose the marriage now. In the course of the scene we had together you were not the only person spoken of. At such moments, many things get said that one has long had on one's mind. After what passed we can no longer be the same to each other. His strongest wish must be that I should live my own life apart from his. True, if he still kept the same opinion of you that he had after his agent's infamous report, he would consider it his duty at any cost to prevent my marriage with you. But I know him. When he learns what I know, all that I know, he will judge you as I do. Though I may often have been jealous of the position he occupied in my mother's affections, I have always respected in him a most upright character and one incapable of compromise. He belongs to that category of highly cultured men who, seeing old beliefs crumbling to ruin, have dreamt of giving our democracy a code of morals founded on reason. They begin by imposing this code of morals on themselves and by practising it. The principle which governs all the actions, all the thoughts of M. Darras, is Justice, which, according to him, consists essentially in the right of each one to act according to his own conscience. No one more than he professes hatred and contempt for worldly hypocrisy. He is in favour of the equality of the sexes, of women lawyers and women doctors. How often have

I heard him say that, socially, we are still in a state of barbarism, that family, property, country are all in a state of evolution, and that the duty of the higher classes is to hasten instead of delaying that evolution. I mention all this to show you how liberal-minded he is. What he hates is lying, and you have been shamefully lied to,—injustice, and if any one has been a victim of injustice you have. He admires those who have the courage of their opinions—and who has this more than you who seek and wish for truth and who live only for it? No. I have no doubt of his answer, and his answer is also my mother's. I do not speak of my real father. If the law forces me to ask his consent, which—what irony!—would be sufficient by itself, I attach no importance to it. But the other, my mother's, does count. Bertha, if I return after my interview with them, having their approval, having made them understand who you are and why I wish to give you my name, will you still answer that it is impossible? Will you still refuse to be my wife?"

"No," she said, "I will not refuse."

She looked at him with eyes which told him she had given him her whole heart and soul. He drew her to him, and for the second time their lips met in a kiss which this time evoked no phantom of the old lover. Had the new life of which the young man had spoken really begun for the girl-mother? After so many years of silent martyrdom and indomitable self-sacrifice she

had a glimpse of a possible future exempt from the nightmare against which she had struggled. When, a few moments later, they left the little garden where that chaste and loving kiss had sealed their promise, it was with a passionate prayer for his success that she saw him walk away in the direction of the Luxembourg. She it was who tore herself away from her friend's embrace with these words:

"We must separate now. It is time for me to be at the hospital. I want a little peace after so much emotion. I have never found any except by sticking to my work quietly and steadily. To keep my balance I must always do the same thing. You shall see, I shall be a very monotonous wife, but a very happy one," she added with a smile such as he had never before seen on her face.

"And I," he answered, "I am eager for the conversation with my stepfather. The idea that he and my mother should misjudge you is too painful to me now. Every minute's delay seems a crime against you."

"Provided they believe you," she could not help adding timidly.

"They shall believe me," he asserted with the conviction of a love-devotee who feels himself strong enough to overcome every doubt. "And I shall go straight to the rue Racine and, if you are not there, to your rooms. Until then, have confidence." And he

added, with the tenderness which filled him to overflowing at that moment, words simple in themselves, but as spoken from him to her, a spiritual caress, words gently uttered, as if he thought she could not bear them: "Good-bye, my dear *fiancée*."

CHAPTER VI

THE OPEN WOUND

IN the momentous interview which involved the whole future of his love for Bertha, Lucien had not given her a detailed account of the thirty-six feverish hours spent in discussing with himself his projected offer of marriage, nor revealed by what means, brutal in their simplicity, he had for the time being cut short any steps that might be taken by his stepfather or his mother. Certain that the latter was cognisant of the detective's report and of the painful scene at the *Grand-Comptoir*, he had felt as averse to seeing her as to seeing Darras himself. He had taken a room at one of the Latin Quarter hotels, and had sent thence a note to the rue du Luxembourg to the servant accustomed to wait upon him, requesting him to hand the bearer a port-manteau and a few things for a short journey. He knew that his request would be communicated to his parents and would prevent them from feeling anxious. The selfishness of love made him oblivious to the moral anxiety from which his mother must be suffering. There was another reason for his neglect: that secret estrangement of the heart between children of the first

marriage and the remarried parent which is the natural outcome of second marriage. Between Lucien and Madame Darras there had never been that full and thorough sympathy which makes two beings so continually present to each other that the feelings of the one find an instinctive response in the other. Darras had formed an ever-present barrier between them. Even when Lucien thought he loved his stepfather most, the latter's presence as a witness had sufficed to impart reserve to his intercourse with his mother. Gradually mother and son had become enveloped in a mist of silent misunderstanding, the harder to dissipate because it had arisen unconsciously. Could the young man have definitely put into words his impression of the maternal home he would have said: "My mother's love for me is not vital. I am not necessary to her!" He would have been mistaken. It was painful to this sensitive and passionate youth to share an affection which he would have wished his exclusively. But shared though it was, his mother's love for him was profound, and the signs of his indifference had pained her deeply. His silence at such a time was the worst of such signs. It will be remembered that after hearing of the scene between the two men and of Lucien's rebellious conduct, the wretched woman had spent the whole afternoon in asking herself with ever increasing anguish—"Where is he, where can he be?" About five o'clock, at the moment she was imploring her husband to go that very

evening to the Central Police Office to ask that enquiries should be made, Lucien's note to the servant arrived.

"I must go myself," she had said. "The messenger will take me. I shall see my son. I shall speak to him. I shall bring him back."

"You must not do that," Darras had answered. It was the first time perhaps since their marriage that he had assumed an imperious tone, as he added: "I forbid you. Lucien has just shown you serious disrespect by not writing to you, after having been still more disrespectful to me. It is his duty to return. Besides," he continued in a more gentle tone, "reflect a little. He may be with that girl. Is it your duty to seek him there? Or perhaps, as I have anticipated, he is investigating the matter and this request for a portmanteau points to a visit to Moret, perhaps to Clermont. In that case he must act alone. Have courage to wait, my dear wife. It does need courage, I confess."

Gabrielle obeyed. Her judgment yielded to this argument: so long as her son was unenlightened, any step she might take ran the risk of making his return more difficult. She contented herself with choosing the clothing for the portmanteau and packing it up with her own hands. This humble occupation made her forget for a moment her sorrow which had been aggravated by the few words of her husband. He had been

almost harsh, he who was as a rule so delicately affectionate. She did not blame him for this. His irritation at Lucien's attitude was only too legitimate. It was none the less true that he had never yet spoken to her in that way, and with a sense of imminent misfortune she went upstairs, as had recently become her practice when she did not go out, to make her daughter say her evening prayers. Here she hoped to find solace, but on the contrary she was seized with a more violent attack of the religious remorse which had led her a few hours before to consult Father Euvarard. When little Jeanne, in her long white night-dress, on her knees at the foot of her bed, had pronounced the words of the prayer:

"Visit, we beseech thee, O Lord, this house: *Visita, quæsumus, Domine, habitationem nostram.*"

"He cannot visit it," the mother had murmured, "since He is insulted here."

The harsh formula, which thus came back into her mind, had been employed by the first priest to whom she had applied and of whom she had spoken in such strong protest to Father Euvarard.—"You are living," he had said to her, "with a man who is not your husband and whom you call your husband when you are really married to another. It is a worse form of adultery, because it is at the same time a public outrage on God."—Yes, how indignantly she had protested against that unjust anathema at the time and even now! That

she applied it to her own case and to herself alone, was a proof that the great work begun in her conscience during the preceding months had just received a fresh and immense impetus during the last few hours of maternal agony. The vague and confused apprehension of a menace hanging over her guilty happiness was changed into a vision, full of terrors and amounting almost to hallucination, of what even the indulgent Oratorian had styled the avenging act of God.

“But God who punishes also pardons,” she said to herself the next morning, after a night spent in turning this terrible idea over and over again in her mind: —“What infliction am I to suffer in my son? Father Euvrard said himself: God is only too ready to pardon. He is the God of vengeance but also the God of pity. I shall pray to Him so earnestly that He will spare me and, if not me, those who are around me and who are not responsible for my faults; Lucien in particular is free from complicity.” And in a sudden outburst of expiatory devotion she had gone with her daughter to hear Mass. Several times already, as the date of her first Communion drew near, Jeanne had asked to be taken to church in the morning to be present at some service along with the members of the Confirmation class. Hitherto Mlle. Schultze had always taken her, as Madame Darras was afraid her husband would make some remark about her own absence; in fact when she returned about nine o’clock from Saint Sulpice on this

occasion, she found Darras waiting for her, dressed to go out.

"Why did you not let me know?" he asked. "I wanted to speak to you."

"I have taken Jeanne to Mass," she answered.

"To Mass?" the father repeated. "But it is not Sunday."

"She often goes on week-days with the rest of the Confirmation class," Gabrielle had said.

"Is it really necessary?" Darras continued. "I repeat my advice of yesterday. As the child is somewhat inclined to mysticism do not allow such impressions to be too numerous."

"Oh! let her have faith," she answered, "much faith! She will only be the better armed against the trials of life."

Darras looked at her in amazement, and she felt herself blushing. She expected a question that did not come—unfortunately. In the frame of mind in which she was, she would not have been able to lie, and the disclosure of her religious troubles at that time would not have been characterised by the tragic violence which later on was to make the conflict between husband and wife so irreconcilable. Albert Darras thought that anxiety about the absent one was the sole cause of this nervous attack. He therefore continued simply:—"I wanted to tell you that I am going straight to the rue Rollin. I am anxious to know whether Lucien has

gone to live with that girl. I don't believe it. But he may be there and we ought to consider what is to be done. If he has really gone away to investigate he will be back within twenty-four hours."

Gabrielle Darras had so earnestly implored the pity of Heaven during her visit to the church that she interpreted her husband's silence after her imprudent exclamation as evidence that her prayers were heard. She thought she recognised further evidence in the news brought by Darras later, that Lucien had not gone to live with Mlle. Planat. The second day thus passed with less feverish excitement than the preceding one owing to this slight revival of hope. It is one of the commonest illusions of souls like hers, who have put aside the practices of Christian discipline, to expect their prayers to be answered immediately and arbitrarily. They do not understand, even in their sincerest moments of repentance, that certain sufferings cannot be averted by any prayer when they form an essential element of the return to the right way, to that eternal, universal, necessary order to which man must, if needs be, be brought back by punishment. It is so rare for him to return to it by repentance unaccompanied by trials. Nevertheless Gabrielle continued to be so sorely troubled that she did not leave the house all day in order to be sure of being in when Lucien reappeared. Inspired by her husband's assurances, she looked for the decisive moment in the morning of the third day when

the young man, at length enlightened by his visit to Moret and perhaps to Clermont, came to throw himself on his mother's breast. One may imagine, then, her emotion when about eleven o'clock her husband hurried into the room to say to her:

"Lucien is here. I have just seen him through the window alighting from a cab. He is returning home. He knows the truth. Was I right?"

"He is coming back!" repeated the mother, clasping her hands:—"Oh, thank God! and I thank you too, Albert." And she clasped him in her arms. The incongruity between her feelings as a Catholic whose religious faith had revived and her wifely love, was only too clearly seen in these contradictory exclamations, and she went on:—"He must see me first and shed his tears in my arms. I will take him to you and you will be kind to him, you will pardon him."

"I have nothing to pardon him," replied Darras. "He is unhappy and he is your son. Let him come to me when he likes. If his troubles are too great now, keep him. I shall see him later. He need speak of nothing. We shall embrace each other and that will be the end of it. I have already forgotten everything."

"Oh! how I love you!" said Gabrielle. Then, with a shudder and grasping his wrist tightly:—"Listen, I hear his step. Let me go to meet him." She gently pushed her husband into his study—this brief scene had taken place in the morning-room—and opened the

door leading into the passage. It was there that Lucien saw her leaning against the door as he came to the top of the staircase. He had very much hoped to have the explanation with his stepfather first. But to see her there, hardly able to stand, her face streaming with tears and pale from the anguish of those two days, made him sick at heart. He ran towards her, and they kissed each other with an affection that for the moment dispelled all else. For the first time for years Lucien discovered to what extent his place in his mother's affection remained intact in spite of her second marriage. On her part, he was once more the child she had brought forth, flesh of her flesh, her only reason for living when she was so wretched, and she kissed him amid her tears, showing her protecting care and love by using the same endearing names as she had done then:

"My darling. I have found you again. It is you. Why did you not come to your mother at once when you were in trouble? Why did you not write to me? I was so anxious. But you are here. You will have me to understand you fully, to pity you, to console you. Don't talk to me now." She made him sit down beside her on the couch, and swaying to and fro she soothed him gently. Lucien had been so much shaken by the commotions of the preceding hours, he was still so stricken, even in his hopes, that he yielded for a moment to the happiness of enjoying the mother's love which

he had never known as an undivided possession. Was not her passionate affection a sure sign that she would not oppose a marriage which would make him happy?

"No, mother," he said at last, "do not pity me. It is true I was very wretched the day before yesterday. My father"—he had been taught to speak of Darras in this way—"my father told you all, did he not?"

"Yes," she answered. The serious, almost solemn tone of her son in no way resembled the convulsive prickings of conscience which she expected. Yet he had learned the truth. His return could not be explained otherwise. Whence then came that serenity which, suddenly, almost frightened her?

"Then," he continued, "you probably know too that I forgot myself and said things I do not really believe? I want to be sure that you do not think I believe them."

"Your father did not repeat your words to me," replied his mother. "It was his wish to forget everything at once. Oh! love him well, Lucien, for he loves you well. By enlightening you about that shameful woman. . . ."

"Don't speak in that way, mother," the young man interrupted with a vivacity which completely disconcerted her. He got up suddenly under the lash of the insult to her whom he loved. Then in a voice broken with emotion:—"I was in the wrong," he continued.

"I should have written to my father, seen him first, explained everything to him. Listen, mother," and he held Madame Darras' hands tightly in his own, "you know how I respect you, how I love you, how incapable I am of lying to you. Well, I give you my word of honour that my father was mistaken and that the person in question is one of the highest and purest minds in existence. But all that, I wish him to tell you himself. It is he who made the accusation: it is he who must withdraw it. He is in his study, the servant told me; I am going there."

Before Madame Darras could utter even a word, he had knocked at the door leading from the morning-room into his stepfather's work-room. When the hangings which served as a door-curtain fell behind him, his mother was tempted for a moment to run and place herself between the two men who met for the first time since the terrible encounter two days before. The words which Lucien had just addressed to her betrayed an attitude of mind diametrically opposed to what she and Albert had expected. An imprudent word uttered by Darras, as she had done a moment ago, would be sufficient to arouse Lucien to rebellion again, perhaps irrevocably. She listened behind the door for the sound of angry voices. She heard no noise. Her womanly instinct told her that her presence might exasperate her son's irritable pride, and might import an element of passion into an interview supposed to be

restricted to matters of fact. Lucien would not have expressed himself so energetically unless he had certain evidence, or thought he had, in support of his opinion. He would give it, and who knows? Perhaps he was right. Perhaps Albert, so sincere, so scrupulously attached to the truth, would be convinced. What would happen then? The fear expressed by him that Lucien might think of marrying Mlle. Planat suddenly crossed his mother's mind. In presence of this fresh menace of the Fates, a few yards away from the room in which her husband and her son were conferring together—to what end?—she had a feeling, amounting to positive horror, of a relentless fatality pursuing her. Her household was cursed. Although her prayers, become more frequent in the last few days, had not averted any of the dangers hanging over her, yet she fell on her knees and began once more to implore God with all her heart. Again and again she stopped to listen when it seemed to her that the voices in the next room were becoming louder. She would say to herself:—"I was mistaken," and resumed her prayer.

When Lucien went into Darras' study, the latter was seated at his desk, apparently busy at a work which he interrupted. If the young man had been self-possessed he would have noticed that the paper in front of the engineer was completely blank. His nervous hand clasped a dry pen, taken up to give himself an unconcerned air. The stepfather did not wish it to be

thought that he was spying on his stepson's movements. Officially he was unaware, until the moment Lucien entered the room, of his return to the house. The stronger a character is, the more evenly balanced are the parts of which it is composed, the more, that is to say, it has the defects of its qualities. The strain involved in the constant tension imposed upon him by his theories of conscience, made Albert Darras incapable of that charming spontaneity which weaker, more pliant but also more human natures, call up to their service in great and difficult crises. Emotion rendered him stiff and awkward instead of frank and flexible. At that moment his heart's instinct would have urged him to take Lucien in his arms, repeating his mother's appeal:—"You are suffering, my son; lean upon me." But, as will be remembered, he had told Gabrielle that, whilst loving Lucien as a son, he knew that the young man did not regard him as a father. Their conflict of two days before had intensified this feeling. Thus it was that at this moment of solemn explanation, his expressive features were drawn and hard. His look, generally so straightforward, betrayed the embarrassment which begets embarrassment in others. Lucien, whose whole heart had just gone out to his mother in fervent communion, at once felt the difference between this welcome and the other. Once more, he had the stranger before him. Yet Darras held out his hand to him as he said:—"It is you, Lucien. I knew you would

come back to us. How happy I feel that it is so soon! You have seen your mother. I was anxious to leave you alone with her at first. She has been ill from anxiety. Your presence must have done her good, and I am sure hers will have had a like effect on you. As to what took place between us the other day we shall say no more about it, shall we? It is forgotten. You have returned home. We have you again. That is the only thing of importance."

"On the contrary, I want to talk about it," replied his stepson. "That is why I have returned home, father. As I said to my mother, I ought to have written to you and seen you before her. It is between you and me that a certain question with which she is not concerned has arisen. That question must be resumed between you and me. But there is one point to be settled before everything else. We separated after very harsh words. I wish first of all to express my regret for what I said at the time. I was suffering very much."

"They were only too natural," interrupted Darras. "I set about the matter badly. I was bound to give you the painful warning I did. But I might have given it differently, prepared you for hearing certain revelations, one by one, methodically. My excuse is that I saw you were running into great danger. I wanted to drag you out of it at once. But, once more, I never doubted you would return. I know you, my

boy, because I can say that, morally, I have made you. You are honour itself. Men such as you may be deceived, led astray. They cannot be perverted."

Lucien's face had darkened on hearing this eulogium, behind which he perceived the same severity of judgment with regard to his friend that had aroused his indignation forty-eight hours before. This time he was able to master his feelings. What did he want? That his stepfather should be compelled to do Bertha justice in the name of his own principles. Darras' last words gave the young man an opportunity which he eagerly seized:

"What I am, I owe to you," he replied, "it is true. I have received from you all my convictions: absolute trust in conscience first and in justice afterwards, the one creating the other. What is justice but religious respect for the individual conscience? And as a condition of both, devotion, even to fanaticism, to truth in all its forms. That is your doctrine, and I have seen you live up to it. It is mine too, and I hope I shall be able to live up to it till the last. When I left you two days ago after the scene which you have just recalled, it was your doctrine which gave me courage. Imbued with it, and having it from you, I clearly saw two points: firstly, you could neither have lied to me, nor accused an innocent person, especially a woman, without due reason; secondly, that my duty was to inform Mlle. Planat immediately. She was accused.

She had the right to defend herself. On leaving the *Grand-Comptoir*, I went directly to her."

"A preliminary and impersonal enquiry would have shown more cleverness," remarked Darras. "But I am not the man ever to blame any one for not being clever. Even without knowing Mlle. Planat, I had for a moment the idea of doing as you have done." He too was too much astonished at the tone adopted by his stepson not to have a presentiment of some fresh development in a situation to which he had seen only two issues: either Lucien would persevere in his illusion, in which case the decisive proof obtained by the Home Office would overcome this credulity; or else, there would be a desperate but irrevocable recognition of the truth and then the rupture would be complete. Therefore it was with amazement that he listened as the young man, his pupil, the living embodiment of his own thought, continued:

"I told Mlle. Planat what you had told me, all you had told me and as you had told it me. You had been quite correctly informed. Five years ago, Mlle. Planat did in fact live for a few months with M. Méjan. She had a child who is being brought up at Moret by her directions. I had no need to question her. It was she in fact who anticipated all my questions. It was she who, at the outset, declared it was true; she who gave me the most exact details of that sad story. She might have denied it. I should have believed her. Not for a single moment did the idea enter her mind."

"It was difficult for her to dispute such precise information," replied Darras. "But you are grateful to her for that frankness and rightly so. It is always right to give a human being credit, and to interpret his actions in the most favourable sense. By way of reservation, I would only point out that this frankness came somewhat late. She should have spoken sooner."

"And why?" interposed Lucien. Beneath his stepfather's studied moderation he had felt the sting. "Yes, why?" he repeated. "On what grounds? In our conversation two days ago you told me she was my mistress, that you knew it. I answered that it was a calumny which I did not even deign to discuss. To-day I am unruffled. Well, I give you my word of honour: the day before yesterday was the first time I had a conversation with Mlle. Planat other than what one student may have with another. For ten months we have seen each other almost every day, several times a day, and I have never told her that I loved her. I have never made the slightest attempt at courtship. She warned me at the outset that at the least word inconsistent with genuine and frank comradeship she would break off the acquaintance. This compact, agreed upon between us, we have kept. Consequently, as a comrade she was not called upon to make any womanly confessions to me that a comrade is not entitled to receive. The straightforwardness of her rela-

tions with me has been beyond reproach. It was absolutely necessary that this should be stated. If you believe that a person's reputation is to be regarded in a favourable light until the contrary is proved, *a fortiori*, you believe that a person must be credited with the qualities really displayed. Is that equitable or not? Answer me."

"That is quite evident," said Darras. His simple and unsophisticated mind abhorred subtleties. He did not quite understand the purport of his stepson's words, but it seemed to him he was not going straight to the point, that he was fencing, and he added, manifestly irritated:—"What are you driving at?"

"What am I driving at?" answered Lucien. "At this: that I was right in protesting strongly when you informed me that Mlle. Planat had done things totally inconsistent with what I knew of her character. Consequently, she has not done them. Let me explain," he insisted almost violently, as his stepfather seemed about to make a gesture of protest. "Just now you gave expression to a very noble idea when you said that we must always give credit to a human being. It is our duty. But in reality so few people give that credit. When a woman gives herself to a man otherwise than by marriage, society has but one word to describe the connection: she is that man's mistress, and but one sentence: she is condemned and despised. Do you admit there is a difference in the action according as the

woman has given herself for money or for love? And a further difference if that love has been simply sensual, or if it has been generous, noble, enthusiastic. You do, don't you? Do you admit that there may be other motives besides money, gallantry, passion even, in such a *liaison*? A girl has been brought up by revolutionists who have taught her to look upon the conventions of modern society as the principle of all wretchedness and all crime. She is persuaded that, among these conventions, marriage is one of the worst. For her Free Union is the true formula of conjugal life, the one which will emancipate man and woman, not from morality, but from lying. She believes that profoundly, absolutely. She meets with a scoundrel who plays with her the comedy of convictions like her own. He gains her love and offers to unite their destinies to found a family such as she understands it, outside those conventions which he pretends to hate as much as she does. The villain intends to break his promise and abandon her. He is a libertine, a seducer. She does not know it. She accepts; will you say that she took a lover? No. She married outside the law, contrary to the law. But everything which constitutes the moral value of marriage is in that union. The story I have just related is the story of Mlle. Planat. Do not answer that I only have her version. There are utterances that do not deceive. I have seen her under the accusation draw herself up with eyes and gestures that

betokened suffering. No. She did not lie to me. Do not think me mad, father, I am not. I am a man coming to entreat you to recognise an injustice you have unwittingly done that woman by judging her as you have, to recognise it and to repair it."

"If recognising it is sufficient reparation, I am prepared to do so," replied Darras. "You have spoken with Mlle. Planat, you have heard her. You assert that she was the victim of false ideas and that there was nothing base in her fault. I have no difficulty in believing it. But where I cannot follow you is when you place Free Union on the same footing as marriage."

"And what is the difference?" asked Lucien.

"Simply, in obedience or disobedience to the law," said the stepfather. He had just perceived clearly and with dismay the plan, in his view a mad one, formed by his stepson. This sudden flash of intuition had cut short the verbal concession which to avoid a quarrel he had begun to make. All the prejudice which he felt against Bertha Planat from the first increased at once. The girl was much more redoubtable than he had thought. Yet he did not wish to discuss her personally, feeling that he would have to face the distracted lover of the previous interview. On the other hand, he was preparing to take an absolutely uncompromising stand on a principle which permeated every fibre of his nature. He belonged to a generation which has lived on the

constant paradox of trying to conciliate all the virtues of the traditional world with a system of ideas most opposed to these virtues. In politics it has aimed at order and national greatness; in morals it has dreamt, and still dreams, of stoicism and integrity—holding at the same time theories of which the immediate consequence is anarchy. This explains how Darras could marry a divorced woman while he was at the same time a convinced defender of the family; how he professed and had taught his stepson uncompromising devotion to facts as they are, whilst possessing in the highest degree that solicitude for middle-class respectability hereditary in all Frenchmen of his class. He was about to experience the anger which the first generation of reformers shows to the second, an anger as common in the secret tragedies of private, as in the much talked of dramas of public life. To protest against his stepson's arguments, he had laid as much emphasis on that fine word *law* as if he and the tyrannical party to which he belonged had not already deprived the term of all meaning. His disciple in revolution was soon to make him feel this.

"There is no law worthy of respect except that which we recognise as just," he answered. "Otherwise what becomes of the individual conscience?"

"It must give way to the interests of the State," said Daras.

"Even when it sees the real interests of the State

in a law opposed to the existing one?" the young man insisted. "That is Mlle. Planat's case, and I persist in claiming that Free Union as understood and put in practice by her is as worthy of respect as the most respectable marriage."

"And I, in a word, will at once prove to you the contrary," replied his stepfather. And fixing his eyes on the young man's eyes to know whether he had guessed correctly:—"That proof is that you have not yet dared to say to me: 'I wish to marry her.'"

"It is true," said Lucien. "I do wish to marry her. I have come to ask my mother's consent, and as she will not give it as long as she retains the same opinion of Mlle. Planat, I beg of you, in the name of the principles you profess, to undo in her mind the work of calumny of which you were the unconscious workman. You see whether I have not dared? But there is no merit in daring when one is defending truth and justice."

"Look here, Lucien," cried the stepfather. "It is not you who talk in that way. It is impossible. You, marry that woman, you! you! Why, she has made you forget what you are, what we are! Marry her! you! Besides why, since you have just told me that you are in favour of Free Union."

"I did not say that," replied the young man, whose tone became sharper and harsher in proportion as his stepfather's became more imperious and irritated. "I

said that the formality of marriage added nothing to Free Union. It takes nothing away from it either. The whole question is to know whether or not submission to this formality is thought opportune. At present, and in the case of Mlle. Planat, I consider it opportune, just because there are people who think as you do, many people indeed, and because I wish to have the right to defend her."

"And you do not think that your mother, on her part, has the moral right not to have her as a daughter-in-law? Your sister the moral right not to have her as a sister-in-law? And that child? You would bring us that child?"

"My mother had me when you married her, and you did not hesitate to offer to help her to make a fresh start in life. I ask for nothing but to be allowed to do as you have done."

"As we have done? Your mother? Your mother? You compare your mother to . . ." And Darras, with clenched fists raised, stepped towards his stepson, while the latter with folded arms and without giving way, repeated:

"Yes, I compare them and that is proof of the respect I have for Mlle. Planat, for my *fiancée*."

"I shall not strike you," said the stepfather, passing his hands over his forehead as if to drive away the disastrous temptation to violence. "I shall not do that on account of that mother, to whom you have just

shown such shameful disrespect. But she is my wife and we shall see if you will repeat the infamy in her presence."

He had opened the door separating the two rooms, and seizing Lucien by the arm he dragged him into the morning-room. This movement had been too sudden, too energetic also, for the young man to escape from it. However upset they both were by the words they had just exchanged, they stopped for a few seconds, motionless and dumfounded in presence of a woman on her knees in prayer, with her face concealed by her hands. Even in his anger Darras turned pale. For a long time past, certain words of Gabrielle, certain fits of melancholy, numerous insignificant and undefinable signs had made him apprehend a subtle change in her mind of which he had now clear evidence. Meanwhile, recalled to self-consciousness by the sound of steps, she had risen from her knees. Standing before her husband and her son, the former still holding the other by the arm, she cried out supplicatingly:

"Albert! Lucien! My dear, if you love me"—she spoke to her husband and took him by the arm to free her son's, "let him go. And you, Lucien, what have you said to him this time? What have you said to each other? You pain me too much." She had placed her hands on her breast as if to still the violent beating of her heart. Then, in a tone which thrilled them both—"Speak to me, do speak to me!"

"It is his duty to speak to you," said the stepfather, pointing to the son. "I have brought him to you for that purpose that he may repeat what he has just said to me. He is ashamed now," he continued, his indignation again aroused, and as the young man continued to keep silence: "Do you know what he has come to ask us? Permission to marry that girl."

"To marry that girl?" repeated his mother.

"Yes," Darras insisted, "to marry her. And do you know besides to what he compared this disgraceful marriage? The words burn my lips to repeat them. But it will be his punishment that you should know how he thought, felt, spoke. To ours, if you please, to ours. That adventuress whom he picked up in the streets of the Latin Quarter. . . ."

"Be silent." This cry from the young man, who had rushed at his stepfather, was mingled with the cry uttered by his mother. She separated them. But Lucien went on, speaking to her:—"Tell him to be silent or I shall compel him. I forbid him to slander that woman, I forbid him."

"You forbid me?" repeated Darras. "You insult me now, after insulting your mother!"

"I do not insult you," said Lucien, "and I have not insulted my mother. I came here in deference to her and to you when I was in no way obliged to come. For after all, it is my real father who has the legal right to permit or forbid my marriage. I wish to marry one I

love and respect absolutely, completely. I had hoped to find in you a support because I thought you a man of convictions. You are not. Henceforth I shall apply to my mother alone for her consent."

"While I live you shall never have it," replied his stepfather: "You have heard what I say, never, never! If you marry that creature your mother will be dead to you."

"I shall wait to hear it from her own lips," replied Lucien. "She was my mother before she was your wife. I shall see whether she is your wife more than she is my mother."

"Wretch!" said Darras, beside himself, "do you want to kill her?" And he pointed to Gabrielle, who had let herself fall into her chair, with a fixed stare in her eyes, her mouth open, her arms hanging by her side as if the blow which her son had just dealt her had really been the last, the one after which moral suffering finds an issue in insanity. On seeing this, the young man likewise uttered a cry of terror. Then, when his stepfather said to him in the loud tones of a man in a fury, about to lose all control of his feelings:—"Go away, do go away, have pity on her and go!" he left the room. Never did a son's pride make a greater sacrifice in thus yielding. He had just understood that so surely as that dispute was prolonged, his mother would die of grief, there, before his eyes. Two minutes later the opening and closing of the front door

announced that the child of the divorced woman had left the maternal roof to return—when? The sound seemed to bring back Gabrielle to a consciousness of the reality, although her husband vainly tried to make her speak. He took her hand, kissed her, entreated her. She seemed neither to see nor to hear him. The signal of her son's departure roused her suddenly from her alarming trance.

"He is gone?" she groaned. "Oh, do run to look for him, my dear, bring him back."

"I cannot," replied Darras. "And if I could I would not bring him back. You saw it yourself. At the present moment he is mad."

"No," she said in a tone which made her husband shudder, "he is not mad. It is he who is right."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"What I say," she repeated, "that he is right. I am no better than that girl. Neither you nor I have the right to condemn her. I love you, Albert," she went on, looking at him with eyes in which at last one could guess the agony caused by her scruples, "and because of that love, for weeks and months I have hidden my tortures from you. I must tell you now. It is necessary, so that you may pardon Lucien. He is but the instrument of justice from above. My dear, you have never *believed*. You do not know what it is to have had God with you and to have Him no longer. When I married you, I was so unhappy and you loved

me so much. I wanted to prove to myself that I had the right to live my life over again with you. I now know that I had not. No," she continued ecstatically, "I had not. Before God I was the wife of another."

"Before what God?" answered Darras. It was no longer a question of his stepson's errors. He was so thunderstruck by his wife's sudden wail of woe that his anger at once disappeared, to give place to a feeling of terrified wonder in presence of the wound laid bare in the bosom of his family. "You do not believe that, Gabrielle?" he entreated. "You cannot believe that you have not done right in accepting to live your life over again with me honestly, loyally, in conformity to a law of wisdom and progress. It would be disowning all our past life: you cannot do that."

"I disown nothing," she said, "but I am full of remorse. Before what God? you ask me. Why, the God of my mother and my father, of your mother and your father; the God to whom I learned to pray when I was quite a child; the God to whom my daughter is learning to pray, the God of the Gospels and of the Church, my Church. I had lost faith in Him, I have found it again. The events of the last three days prove to me that I was right; our house is cursed. We are stricken because we are in revolt against Him, because we insult Him, every day, because"—She hesitated an instant; she thought of the words of Father Euvrard:

Confess with the mouth what the heart thinketh to obtain salvation. "Oh! I must say all, you shall know all my heart, that heart which loves you so much, but the voice of conscience is stronger—because we are not married!"

CHAPTER VII

SILENCE

IN the Gospels may be found a very mysterious sentence concerning the coming of the Saviour: "He shall be for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." For eighteen hundred years the history of humanity has been one long accomplishment of this prophecy. It is realised with equal exactness, and in a still more striking way perhaps, in connection with individual destinies, even of the humblest kind, whenever, as in the case of Gabrielle Darras, the religious problem with all its deep-rooted implications is propounded. This problem is still present, acute, living, to such an extent that the most incredulous never face it with that indifference which complete negation would imply. It will set vibrating in our moral nature secret chords of which the existence is often unknown to ourselves, but which, hidden in our innermost consciousness, are the heritage of remote ancestry. At its call we hear awakening within us the latent and unconscious appeal of atavism, the irrepressible voice of "the dead who speak," as a great writer has forcibly expressed it. Whether we obey or whether we resist, it calls up within us a new

being, sympathies, dislikes, desires, in which we no longer recognise ourselves. Darras would certainly have been greatly astonished if any one had foretold that one day his gentle, timid Gabrielle, so submissive in mind and heart, both by affection and by natural timidity, would rise up in revolt against him, sustained by an unflinching energy. Still less would he have believed that he himself would experience such an access of wounded pride and be tempted to act so despotically toward the frail creature whom he had loved so deeply as a young girl, pitied so much as the wife of another, protected so well and so tenderly since their marriage.

From the very beginning of their conversation, the avowal of her reviving piety had disconcerted him. True, he had sometimes feared it without admitting it, and now he found that the inward storm had lasted for months, and that his wife had been able to keep it hidden from him! The discovery filled him with anger, which turned to indignation when Gabrielle uttered the terrible words—"We are not married." The insult hurled thus, and from those lips, at their twelve years of happy intimacy, at the honour of their household, at the dignity of their home, had made his gorge rise. His whole frame had quivered as if he had received a blow in the face. He remained for a few seconds so dumfounded that words at first failed him. He stood in front of Gabrielle, frightened now at what she had

dared to say. Until that moment, the horrible thought that her first marriage, the one blest by the Church, was still valid and that the second, the one without sacraments, was no marriage, had never taken such an acute shape even in her mind. By uttering it, she had given a precise and concrete form, so to speak, to a vague feeling which haunted her and which she could no longer shake off. It was the most intense moment of emotion that husband and wife had experienced in their intercourse since the day when Albert Darras had come to ask Madame de Chambault to begin life afresh with him.

"We are not married?" he repeated at last. And then, imperiously, brutally:—"Who is the priest who has put that criminal folly into your head?"

"None," she answered firmly.

"Who is the priest?" he insisted with an outburst of rage in which the burning fanaticism of the partisan showed itself. "There is one! I was determined to keep the promise I gave when I married you. This is how I am rewarded. You have gone to church with your daughter. You have spoken to priests. They have scented a prey and a rich one. One of them has been entrusted with the task. The happiness of a household not of their making, the harmony of a man and woman who have done without their services, is what they cannot bear. Man and woman must be both made unhappy! The peaceful, respected, happy home

must be shattered! What do these fanatics care! Oh, how I hate them!"

"Do not accuse any one, Albert," she entreated, "you have no right to do so. On what do you wish me to swear that no priest has influenced me? On our child? You will believe me if I do. I swear it on her head. I have found faith again by myself alone, quite alone. . . . How and when, I do not know, I saw Jeanne praying, I saw her believing. All the piety of my childhood and youth has returned to me through my daughter. And now I believe. I believe in God. I believe in the Gospel. I believe in the Church. I believe in the sacraments. I can no more pluck these beliefs from my mind than I can pluck daylight from my eyes. For me they are as true, as certain. A priest? Why, if I were to lose faith again, it would be the fault of these priests. Since this crisis began a year ago, I have only seen two, half an hour each. They were so hard, so uncompromising, even the best. The result would have been to cast me back on your ideas if that were possible. Yet one of them is a learned man whom you admire: Father Euvrard."

"The member of the Institute?" asked Darras, and exasperated by this fresh revelation he continued:

"Father Euvrard has lent himself to receiving clandestine visits from a wife without her husband's knowledge? And I, who put him in a category quite apart from the members of his species, I who would almost

have sympathised with him if he had come into the clutches of the recent laws. How just, how wise those laws are! Father Euvrard! Oh! how infamous!"

"I repeat I have only seen him once for half an hour. He, too, was so conscious of the irregularity of the step I had taken that he asked me to return only after I had spoken to you of the visit."

"You told him then that you came without my knowledge? You must have given a reason for doing so—You put him in possession of our family secrets?"

"My dear," she interrupted him sadly, "do not think that! I did not mention your name, I should have died rather."

"What does it matter to me whether he knows my name?" exclaimed Darras. "What does matter is, that you would speak to another man of things about which you were silent to me, that you paid a visit which I did not even suspect. . . . When did you pay it? Answer."

"The day before yesterday."

"Thus"—he groaned, "whilst I was devotedly occupied on your behalf with your son's affairs, whilst I was reproaching myself for having to conceal my fears about him from you in order not to cause you anxiety, you were betraying me. Yes, because it is treachery to a man, living as we do, to hide anything from him. And you did not hear that cry of conscience you have just spoken of? You had no remorse for that lie?"

"I, too, did not wish to cause you anxiety," she answered. "I knew you would be so unhappy at my return to faith. And I felt so much the need to go to Communion with my daughter. For this I wanted to go to Confession."

"You have gone to Confession?" asked Darras. The bitterness displayed in this question showed still greater enmity, the bitterness of the husband for whom the Confessor is no anonymous and impersonal representative of the invisible Judge, but a man who comes between husband and wife.

"Neither Father Euvrard nor the other priest would receive my confession," replied Gabrielle, "when they learned that I was divorced and had remarried."

"You admit it then! They told you that your marriage was not a marriage," continued Darras. "And you listened to them? You believed them? You do believe them?"

"All that they told me about our marriage," she replied, "I had already learnt from the catechism. For pity's sake, Albert, wait until we have resumed this conversation before judging me. At the present moment you are not answerable for what you say. Nor am I. And I hear Jeanne coming down. Don't let her suspect anything, I entreat you. She is so sharp. Never, never, let her guess what you think. Don't interfere with her faith, my dear, for the reason I have just mentioned. Oh! promise me!"

"I am a man of my word," said Darras. "It is a principle which will cost me dear. But I am not one of those who allow their ideas to be governed by their impressions. I have given my word. I shall continue to act towards her as I have always done."

The hands of the small Louis XVI. clock marked twelve o'clock, the hour for lunch. It was a beautiful day in early spring, and the mild sunlight which had shone that very morning on the betrothal of Lucien and Bertha was pouring into the morning-room where stood husband and wife once so united, now threatened with the most cruel, the most pitiless of separations, the separation of beliefs. It played on the window-curtains of dark grey guipure; its rays darted along the window-hangings of striped silk, over the polished furniture with its delicate festooned designs, its exquisite carving—all somewhat faded but still showing a graceful and carefully studied elegance. The happiness which had long found a congenial setting amid all these charming things had now faded completely, and the anxious expression on the faces of Gabrielle and Albert was in striking contrast with the cheerfulness of the room and of the hour. This antithesis was brought home to them more forcibly by the entrance of Jeanne, who came in with a smile on her lips and unconcern in her eyes, followed by her quiet and ungainly governess, Mlle. Schultze, whose heavy tread had warned the mother of their approach. Darras was soon able to

verify the correctness of Gabrielle's remark about their child's sharpness. Determined, in accordance with his promise, not to betray his emotion, he had opened a newspaper and was pretending to be absorbed in it. The mother, on the other hand, busied herself with arranging her work-basket. A mere glance enabled the little girl to guess that her father and mother had just assumed this attitude for her sake. She saw that they were labouring under very great excitement. Her dark eyes betrayed all at once an embarrassment. The engaging prattle in which her childlike joy of life was about to overflow, stopped abashed upon her lips, and after kissing her parents, she too endeavoured to put on an unconcerned look by turning over the leaves of a picture-book on the table. The instinctive way in which she raised her pretty head at Mlle. Schultze's naïve question proved, to her mother at least, that her precocious mind had only obtained a glimpse of one of the two dramas which were being enacted under the parental roof.

"Where can M. Lucien have gone?" the imprudent Fräulein had enquired. "I thought I saw him coming in just now."

"He was obliged to go away again immediately for a short time," replied Darras. In spite of his horror of opportunist lying, he was obliged to justify his stepson's absence by the pretext of a journey. To begin to lie was so painful to him that he uttered the phrase

snappishly. The governess was quite taken aback. Then, cutting short any further question, as they were going into the dining-room, the father said:—"Will Jeannette have a good place at school this week; what was the subject of her essay?"

"Cosmography, Papa," replied the child.

"Her paper seemed to me very satisfactory," said Mlle. Schultze. "And it was good for her because it is a science of which she is not particularly fond."

"Yet it is a fine science, the finest of all perhaps," resumed Darras. "Yes, it is indeed," he continued, speaking to his daughter. "You have been taught mythology, have you not? What a poor show is made by Olympus, Jupiter, Apollo, Diana, compared with the simple reality that is revealed by observation; the earth hurled into space and describing round the sun that path which we can measure to a mile; the other planets also borne in the sun's orbit with a velocity which we likewise measure: the sun in the centre of his people of stars, he himself hanging suspended in space amid the whole economy of his nebula: that nebula, dust of suns all of which have their retinue of satellites, occupying its appointed place in its own system, side by side with other systems extending indefinitely throughout infinite space. What a grandiose and truly poetical vision! And when we think that man, an insignificant mite lost on an imperceptible fragment of the earth's crust, has discovered the eternal laws which govern

those luminous globes—golden nails, as they must have seemed to him, studding the impenetrable vault of heaven—can we fail to admire him for such an achievement? For tools he had only his feeble eyes and his intelligence, but they were sufficient.”

“And how can we fail to admire the God of the Christian’s creed, the Creator of Heaven and Earth?” said Madame Darras. She had detected in her husband’s words not indeed a breach of his promise but a purpose which filled her with dismay. With what astonishment had she not listened when, as will be remembered, Father Euvrard described Religion and Science as two conterminous and parallel domains which, differ from each other as they may, are yet, in the main, identical? But for too many years she had been too completely dominated by Darras’ ideas not to be persuaded of the contrary. And now, as she listened to her husband, she had a dim premonition of a hitherto unforeseen danger; from that day forward he would use any and every opportunity to fill his daughter’s mind with the conceptions of Science. To what purpose? if not in the hope that, later, when confronted by the opposition between the denial of the supernatural involved in these conceptions, and faith in the supernatural derived from her education, she would choose as he himself had done. The dread of such an alarming possibility drew from the mother a cry of protest to which the father was unable to reply; had he

not, a quarter of an hour previously, renewed his undertaking of neutrality? He showed how faithfully he held to it by not carrying discussion any further, and the remainder of lunch was passed in constrained silence. But when he found himself again alone with his wife he took her interruption as a text for continuing the conversation from the point at which he had let it drop. With glad relief, but also with some little fear, she noticed that his tone was no longer harsh. Her confession of faith had given her strength to withstand violence, but would she not be powerless against an affectionate and sorrowful complaint? Jeanne had left after offering her forehead to be kissed in turn by her mother and father. At once the latter began:

“Do you really hold the God of whom you spoke just now, to whom you attribute the creation of heaven and earth and of all the myriad hosts of stars, an almighty, infinitely just and good God, capable of pursuing with his vengeance two creatures, guilty, of what?—of union to found a home—and because the home has been constituted without the aid of a few meaningless ceremonies, that it is criminal, accursed? Note, that I am arguing from your point of view; to my mind an anthropomorphic God is merely the last of the idols which man has fashioned, as has been said by a large-minded priest who incurred thereby, of course, the hatred of his fellow priests. No! law in the universe, conscience in man, that is God. Ask your conscience,

the true conscience, the one that has not been warped by your early education; listen to the voice of your heart, for instance when you have kissed your daughter; and acknowledge that denial of a marriage in which you have given and received nothing but happiness cannot be justified. It is a morbid tendency which you must promise me to resist. To indulge it further would be wrong."

"You talk as if I were ill," replied Gabrielle, shaking her head. "I am not. Do you think that every one of your arguments has not already occurred to me? Do you think that whenever I have felt remorse my whole heart did not protest as I recollected how kind and devoted and considerate you have been, our trust in each other, the loyal confidence that has always reigned between us, and, above all, as I thought of our little Jeanne. All these were joys, dear and sweet joys, but joys that were forbidden us."

"By the law of the Catholic Church, true," answered Darras with the tone of a man who, having made up his mind not to give way to anger, discusses an opinion on its merits and as if his own fate were not at stake. "But let us argue the point. Who proclaimed the law? Certain men. Other men have proclaimed other laws, as divorce is permitted by our code and by that of almost all civilised peoples. And why is the law which forbids more worthy of respect than the one which allows? Answer me calmly. You see

how calm I am, how ready to look at your ideas from your standpoint, to try and understand them."

"Why is the law of the Church more worthy of respect?" she said. "Just because it is not the work of man. Whose then? That of God. Ah, forgive me for recalling those words of the gospel which pain me so intensely when I repeat them to myself—and I have been repeating them every day, for months: *Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another committeth adultery against her; and if she herself shall put away her husband and marry another, she committeth adultery.* Prove that this is not written. You cannot."

"No, but, to use your expression, written by whom? The Gospels are not the work of God, as I have proved and can prove to you, but of men. The Gospels tell us about a man, a very great man, the greatest of men, if you like, by his virtues, his purity of mind, his moral loftiness, but still a man and, as such, liable to error. Here, common sense tells us he was in error."

"You have proved and are proving to me that you do not *believe* whilst I *do believe*," answered Gabrielle. "I believe because, like the apostle, I have seen. Yes, with my soul's eyes I have seen Him, who you say was merely a man, working and living in Jeanne's heart. I have seen that child grow in perfection under an influence that could come only from above, that pointed to a spirit, enlightening, guiding, loving her spirit. I

have told you, and I told Father Euvrard, the mother in me was persuaded by that light. I understood that if a piety like my child's was only a lie then everything in the world was a lie, and everything does not, cannot lie. My judgment refuses to admit it. That is the judgment of an ignorant woman, but Father Euvrard is not an ignorant person. He thinks as I do, and not on this point only, on the other too."

"What other?" asked Darras almost in a tone of distress. It was the anxiety of a man overcome by so sudden a stroke that he is uncertain of the whole extent of his misfortune. He trembles to think of what remains to be discovered. Once the first shock was over, the husband, so grievously offended in his pride as a man, had made an effort to recover his equanimity. We have seen that he was successful, and that after lunch he had been able to speak quietly to Gabrielle. He had come to the conclusion that he had to deal with a purely sentimental crisis of nervous origin. Extreme patience was the best remedy. Opponent of all prejudice as he fancied himself, he was prejudiced in this: he went very near confounding religious emotion with hysteria. His fresh conversation with his wife appalled him by its revelation of a coherent system, positive conceptions, passionate but precise assertions, in a mind so long modelled on his own. He scarcely recognised her. But did she recognise herself? The violent emotion she had just experienced, had, so to speak,

opened a fissure in her conscience through which there gushed out a flood of ideas that had been silently stored up in the innermost recesses of her being. Stirred thus and so deeply, to what length was she not capable of going? It was this unknown element that terrified Darras. What had been the advice given to her by Father Euvrard, the remembrance of which haunted her so persistently? To go away doubtless, to leave the second husband who in the eyes of the bigoted priest and now in her own, alas! was only a lover under a legal name. How hard it would be to have even to struggle against such a project. Consequently he felt real relief when he heard Gabrielle answer:—"Our troubles with Lucien were absolutely unknown to M. Euvrard as they were to me; I learned them from you after I left him and came here, and thus could not tell him anything about them. As long as I live I shall never forget his predicting them to me. When you told me of the scene with that unfortunate boy I shuddered. Father Euvrard had just foretold it. Do you think I am dreaming? *Fathers and mothers judged and condemned by their son,—deadly conflicts between step-father and stepson, horrible disputes between former husband and wife concerning their son's marriage.* Those were his words. I remember them all. He enumerated all the catastrophes he had seen falling on homes like ours. It was our story he was telling me. Answer me. Just now, did not Lucien pass judgment

on us? Did he not condemn us? Did you not exchange words which were like stabs with a knife? They entered my heart and tore it. Did Lucien not tell you that to get married, he only required one consent legally, his father's. And if he went to ask it on leaving us, what can I do, save begin the struggle with M. de Chambault over again? What a struggle! How cruel it will be for me. Ah, every one of the priest's words, every threat of punishment will be realised."

"And you do not wish me to think you are ill?" said Albert, taking her hand. He drew her to him with a gesture that betokened support and protection, and she did not resist. "Why, it is my duty to be strong for you and to cure you. Once more I repeat, just consider a little. I dispute neither the mathematical attainments of Father Euvarard nor the sincerity of his religious convictions. Yet if he had not displayed more logical acumen in his works than in the so-called predictions which you relate, he would not be a member of the Institute. It only proves that, as Renan said of one of his masters at Saint Sulpice, he has water-tight compartments in his brain. The geome-trician is in one and the visionary in another. For in fact, when Lucien dared to say to me that you were his mother before being my wife, it was your second marriage he reproached us with. If you had made that second marriage as a widow instead of as a divorced woman, the reproach would have been the same. If I

had married you as a widow the unfortunate boy's disposition would have clashed just as keenly with mine over his absurd project. As to the project itself, consider it again. Lucien has not gone to M. de Cham-bault to ask the consent that you refuse him. He will not go. It would be an insult to you of which I still think him incapable even in his madness. If he did go, you have the decree of the court giving you the custody of the child. But sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. My object has been to show you from the facts, as far as we are now in possession of them, that between your divorce and the troubles that have overtaken you, there is no relationship of cause and effect. The Church admits the second marriage of a widower or widow. Though I make no pretence to erudition I can even remember that the prescription of such marriages was accounted a heresy by certain theologians. If you had made a second marriage in such conditions, once more I say, Father Euvrard would have no right to reproach you and yet your trials would be the same."

"No," answered Gabrielle, "not the same. I should have Lucien's esteem. If I had been a widow we should have been married by the Church, and then he would not have had the right to compare our marriage to the one which he proposes to make."

"And which he shall not make!" interrupted Darras energetically. His wife's allusion to the different, and

in her eyes evidently superior, character which would have invested their marriage under other circumstances, had, as before, kindled in his eyes a flash of indignant fury. The energy with which he asserted the failure of Lucien's schemes was the only indication of his emotion. He mastered his feelings at once, thoroughly determined not to depart again from the attitude of protecting indulgence which he had taken up instinctively with all the spontaneity and rapidity of a physiological reaction. When a man and woman have lived like these two in absolute intimacy for several years, hiding nothing from each other, disputing about nothing, making only one, the sudden manifestation of a principle of ineradicable divergency produces at first a harrowing pain and then an immediate effort at reunion. Before admitting that they will never more beat as one, these two hearts endeavour to seize each other fast again, to unite with all the love that is still left in them, as if they hoped to shatter, to crush, to annihilate, in a supreme moral embrace the fatal germ which has not yet accomplished its work of separation. Both labour at this task with their special faculties. In his married life, Darras had become accustomed to treat Gabrielle as a creature disarmed against fate and requiring to be defended. By marrying her he had defended her against her first husband, then against the malevolence of the world towards divorced women, and recently against her son. It was now necessary to de-

fend her against herself. How? One thing stood out clearly amid the many confidences of which her troubled soul had unburdened itself. It was Lucien's marriage with an unworthy woman which had materialised the vague scruples that haunted her imagination. In it she had seen a palpable verification of the threats by which a priest, an imprudent one to say the least, had, instead of calming her ardent imagination, excited it still more. Provided that this marriage did not take place, that Lucien returned home, affectionate as of yore, that their peaceful, regular, happy family life was resumed, the effect would disappear with the cause. The nightmare would vanish and with it that attack of superstitious terror. It would be the husband's duty to diminish the chances of a return to religious mania; he would surround his wife with a still more loving solicitude, he would conquer one by one the false ideas which her return with her daughter into the fatal atmosphere of Catholic devotion had revived in her. The task would be easy because Jeanne's first Communion would be over in a few weeks. Having kept his word, the father would be free in his turn to take his daughter's education in hand. It would be an episode as painful as unexpected, but an episode only, out of which their household would come unscathed, and so much the quicker the sooner this deplorable affair of Lucien was settled. All these thoughts, some confused, the last very distinct, had

risen in Darras' mind in the course of his conversation with Gabrielle. They concentrated in the resolve to prevent his stepson's marriage at any cost, a resolve which he confirmed by repeating:

"No, this marriage of Lucien shall not take place. I have a sure way of preventing it. You will then understand, when you have your son back cured of his folly, that Father Euvrard's words mean nothing, absolutely nothing. For Lucien will return. I guarantee that. And you will then no longer think yourself punished for an imaginary fault. Once again we shall live together on the same terms as formerly. I guarantee that also. All I ask you is never to be reticent again. Think aloud with me. I wish you to be as happy as you have been, with the same complete happiness, springing from the union of our two hearts and minds. We have known that happiness, we shall know it again."

There was so much conviction in the tone of his assurances, his eyes betrayed such ardent devotion—Gabrielle submitted once more for a moment to the spell of a personality on which her own had leant so much. The total absence of ill-feeling towards Lucien which she noticed in Darras after such a violent dispute, in which the young man had shown so much ingratitude, touched her as wife and mother. To have spoken in this way, to be free from the silence that had weighed upon her, gave her even in her troubles a feeling of deliverance

which was displayed in an outburst of affection. She threw herself into her husband's arms as she said:

"I love you! I want to know nothing more! Let my soul be lost, but let me never leave you, never!"

"It shall not be lost and you shall not leave me. But"—he looked at his watch—"time presses. We must act to-day."

"You will try to see Lucien again," she asked, trembling. "In his excited state, I am afraid."

"I am not going to see him again," continued Darras. "Only give me full liberty to act, and have confidence. His marriage shall not take place. I give you my word and you know that I keep my promises."

Had the husband that confidence which he tried in this way to inspire, to impose almost on his wife? Did he really possess the sure method of which he had proclaimed the infallible efficacy? When he had left Gabrielle somewhat calmed by his forcible assertions, his countenance was far from showing the certainty of success which he had simulated rather than felt. His object was at any cost to cut short a fit of despair too painful alike for her who was attacked and for him, the powerless onlooker.

He had scarcely left the house when he took a cab and drove to the Place Beauvau to the Home Office. In the campaign upon which he had decided in order to keep his promise and prevent a marriage, which threatened to have such far-reaching effects on the

mother, this was the first step to be taken. It was necessary to find out, as he had said the evening before, whether official and consequently indisputable evidence would not enable him to convict Mlle. Planat of lying. His opinion was unaltered; she had acted a comedy for Lucien, who would only cease to be deceived by it when it was proved that she had had more than one lover, a fact of which Darras felt sure. Méjan was not the only one who had crossed her path. All that story of a "Free Union," contracted between two consciences, through hatred of unjust laws and a barbarous society, seemed to him a fairy-tale carefully constructed for a simple-minded visionary of twenty-three. Had he foreseen the full extent of her daring imposture, he would certainly have provided himself at the outset with more complete information about her. If he got this, it would still be in time, as Lucien, in spite of all his infatuation and of the heat engendered by his altercation with his parents, had remained true to his ideals. He had not said: "I love Mlle. Planat and I will marry her in spite of everything," but "I respect her and therefore I will marry her." Destroy this absurd feeling of respect and the whole dangerous project would be destroyed. All the romantic dream of rehabilitating a wrongly judged woman would fade away. And even if, as was always possible, however unlikely, the new enquiry were to fail, other steps could still be taken and would certainly be successful. A bribe, if sufficiently

high, would always prevail upon the adventuress to abandon her victim. Darras was both scrupulous and refined; he recoiled from buying a conscience, even though he despised its owner; the idea of mercenary bargaining was in the last degree distasteful to him; the mere fact of instructing the detective of the *Grand-Comptoir* had been extremely painful to him. He shrank far less from applying to the Home Office; to a man of his formalist and somewhat conventional views, the use of the governmental machinery masked the real nature of the work he wanted done. The high official to whom he made his application promised that within a fortnight all the information at his disposal should be put together. Darras returned to his office, from which he had never before absented himself without giving formal notice. He now really hoped, whereas in his interview with Gabrielle he had only affected to hope, oblivious of the fact that his estimate of Mlle. Planat's character formed the sole basis of his hopes. And yet, when he found himself alone again before his work table, he fell into such deep melancholy as to be incapable of any effort. Twice that day had he been wounded, and each time in the tenderest, most sensitive feelings of his heart. Lucien had shown at this second interview that his sentiments of the previous day were no mere hasty outbreak of anger. They betokened a deep-seated resolution. At forty-eight hours' interval his anger had manifested itself in the same way, with

the same spontaneity, each time in accents of resentful bitterness, intense hatred. And he himself, calm as he now was, noted with astonishment an answering bitterness in his own heart which would not be appeased. Husband of a divorced woman, he had been proud of two things: he had flattered himself on having entirely supplanted the real father in the stepson's heart, and now his feeling towards that stepson was one of commonplace instinctive aversion. To evoke this feeling a few words had sufficed: "She was my mother before she was your wife." How proud, too, he had been of the fact that his home-life, despite its compromising origin, had been maintained at the level of the highest religious ideal, in the moral and spiritual unity, the lofty and delicate fidelity which subsisted between husband and wife, and now she, his wife, was dissatisfied with it, was faithless to it, say what she might. For is there a worse form of faithlessness than remorse? Darras was masterful; one after another he had realised the most ambitious dreams of his youth, thanks to his persistent and patient energy. But it was not alone the double failure of his most dearly cherished aspirations that tortured him. He still loved Gabrielle with the exclusive passion of a young lover, even if years and habit had somewhat abated his ardour. The thought that her woman's soul was no longer wholly his; that, unperceived by him, sentiments and ideas of the most intimate, the most deeply seated character, and alas!

hostile to his own, had sprung up and flourished there—all this filled him with a shuddering sense of pain and revolt. The spasm of jealousy was as acute, as piercing as that which would have convulsed him had the faithlessness been of another kind. There, before his eyes, Gabrielle was kneeling as he had seen her when he dragged Lucien into her room. The sight filled him with inexpressible bitterness. The husband in him, but not alone the husband, was wounded; still more intensely was the fanatic affected, the uncompromising sectary for whom Catholicism had always been the great national sin, the ages-old poison to be eliminated at all costs. How right he had been in hating religion as one hates a living being, religion ever ready to intrigue, to intermeddle with those who flattered themselves they were wholly rid of it. But he would not let himself be thrust out of his happiness, he would not, without a struggle, give up to the Church, that incarnate lie, a soul which was his, a treasure which he had won at the cost of so many years! He would struggle and he would overcome. A little while before and he had feigned confidence for Gabrielle's sake, now he drilled himself into it by the energy with which he repeated "I shall conquer," and when his colleague, Delaître, who had offered to take Lucien with him on his trip round the world, came into his room, it was in all good faith he said:

"My stepson has not quite made up his mind, but in

a week I hope to give you a definite answer and that he will be able to go with you."

Whilst Darras, systematically optimistic as he was, was thus discounting the result of his application to the Home Office, his wife's mind was working in a similar groove of hopes and fears with a result, however, the very opposite of what he expected. For him the application was a stage in the process of breaking off Lucien's marriage; once this was accomplished he could easily cure her of her religious anxieties. She had fully understood when her husband left her in such a confident mood that he meant to open a more searching enquiry into Mlle. Planat's past. Once alone, she gave herself up to long reflections on the whole situation and she found in them new reasons for hope. Lucien's profession of esteem for Mlle. Planat had struck her as it had done her husband. Let her unworthiness be proved and he would break with her. The proof must be unanswerable, but in that case it would certainly suffice. Yes, but would it? . . . Gabrielle answered this question in the affirmative as her husband had done. Besides, Albert had probably thought of some other plan. Had she been accustomed to face the realities of life, she would soon have run over in her mind all the few possibilities of action which the situation allowed of. But carefully preserved for years, as she had been, from all contact with life, what sense of reality could she have? The words "family-council," "legal sequestra-

tion," flitted vaguely through her mind, as offering a possible means of success. What need had she to know in all its details the nature of Albert's effort; she knew he would act loyally, devotedly, efficaciously, for was he not courageous and intelligent? No: her son should not marry that girl. She, too, strained her will to force conviction upon herself. Grievously, however, was Darras mistaken in his reckoning. The very chance of success fed in her the flame of religious ardour which he fondly hoped to extinguish. What had happened? This. In the interval between the first interview with Lucien and Darras' departure she had taken a decisive step, she had spoken, and in so doing had obeyed Father Euvarard. At once her horizon had cleared even when it seemed darkest. She remembered the priest's words, "You may be able to deserve the favour of God." . . . True, the prudent Oratorian had ended "in a certain measure," emphasising thereby the difference which Catholic theology, humane in spite of all its inflexibility, establishes between the state of *Grace* with its incommensurable superiority, and that of purely *natural* good will. She overlooked the distinction; had not the priest recalled the right possessed by every pleading soul in virtue of the great promise: "Ask and it shall be given you"? Surely she had *deserved* in the priest's sense by professing the faith she had so long kept hidden. And what more manifest sign of divine approval of her sacrifice than her hus-

band's acquiescence after the first shock of surprise and anger? The day before, this morning even, she had done nothing to deserve a favourable answer to her prayers, but now . . . She had expiated her unspoken falsehood, Albert knew all her thoughts, henceforth she would be able to submit her life, irregular though it was, to the chastening discipline which Father Euvarard had indicated. True, there was no question of formal re-entry into the Church, of the ardently longed for participation in her sacraments, of the complete forgiveness of the fault in which she had persisted so blindly and so long before she recognised its nature and extent. But nevertheless hers would be a Christian life, maimed and imperfect it might be, but still such as to merit the compassion of infinite Goodness, as to deserve the cessation of her recent sufferings. Let Darras but succeed, as he had promised, in preventing this marriage with all its accompanying dishonour, let him restore her son, and these days of agony culminating in the last agonising scene, might mark the dawn of her soul's new-found salvation!

Thus the afternoon was comparatively calm, as was also the evening, in spite of the strange and penetrating sadness which affected her mind. She ought, one would have thought, to have felt at ease concerning her husband, after the frank unburdening of her heart and his affectionately expressed desire for perfect confidence in the future. She was soon to learn that households in

which husband and wife know nothing of each other are not those which truly suffer from the curse of mutual reticence, but rather those where every secret thought is known to both, but where neither dares give them open expression for fear of wounding the other. What a contrast was the present evening with the many she had spent in the same room, Albert's study, she working, he reading aloud, discussing the newspaper, the politics of the day. At other times, what pleasant interchanges of thought on some point that interested both equally: Lucien's future, that of Jeanne. On such occasions Darras would expound his social views, accepted then by her without cavil. How she had rejoiced in presenting her mind to her husband as a mirror which reflected only his thoughts, and which loved him. And now . . . she sat in her usual arm-chair at the fireside; within reach was a little table with her basket of wools and silks for her embroidery; her needle pricked the canvas mechanically, and she kept her eyes lowered lest they met her husband's look. He, too, sat at his desk, writing busily on the feigned pretext of arrears of correspondence. When the pen ceased to scratch the paper her heart contracted in a nervous dread lest the afternoon's discussion should begin again. No; the pen resumed writing. . . . On the other side of the fireplace was a low chair where Lucien used to sit when, before leaving for his period of military service he had spent his leisure-evenings with them.

Gabrielle's eyes were fixed upon the reminiscences of their past happiness with a passionate yearning that filled them with tears. With her mind's eye she saw her son in the company of the wretched creature who had led him so profoundly astray, and who, to have gained such a hold over him, must have acted, must still be acting, an odious comedy of simulated modesty. What a contrast in their respective positions. Whilst the parents were suffering the grief of estrangement, the son was enjoying with his paramour an intimacy all the more hateful to the wife and mother because it was a hypocritical parody of true home life! She had the vision of Bertha absorbed in her work, of Lucien's eyes fixed upon her with the passionate devotion which had so impressed Darras when he first saw them together. The vision became an hallucination, and she began to tremble for the success of her husband's efforts, a success in which she had so ardently desired to believe. She was tempted to question him, but she did not dare. To tranquillise her mind she forced herself to think of her little girl to whose prayers she had just been listening. Surely God would be unable to refuse her credit for the child's soul which she had defended against the father's unbelief. Silently, she put up her supplications to the God whose succouring aid was more than ever necessary to her harassed soul. *Our Father which art in Heaven . . .* how these words, uttered in Jeanne's fervent tones, re-awoke in her the half-effaced

traces of her early piety! The hours slipped by to the monotonous rhythm of the clock, the loud ticking of which, mingled with the intermittent rumbling of the traffic, alone broke the quiet of the spacious room, until, midnight having struck, she rose, almost mechanically, from her dreams and prepared to go to bed. She folded her work and came to say good-night to her husband, as her custom was when he had pressing business to finish and stayed up late. On such occasions he slept in his dressing-room in order not to disturb her. When she rose, he seemed as if he were about to ask her a question. But after a moment's hesitation he took leave of her with a kiss and the words:

“Ah, if ever death separates us, how much you will regret having spoilt our happiness for the sake of such wild fancies.”

As she remained silent, he let her go and sat down again to his work. When she had left the room he buried his face in his hands and wept silently and long. He little thought that Gabrielle, kneeling at her bedside, was praying for strength to enable her to keep him at a distance, and thus realise the sacrifice of which she had spoken to Father Euvrard: “Until then, although I share his home, I shall live with him as a sister with her brother.”

The feeling that when together each was most alone, most separated from the other by an impassable barrier,

this feeling which was crushing her, was one that increased instead of diminishing with the lapse of time. When husband and wife have allowed a barrier of reticence to grow up between them, every day makes it harder to break it down. To meet again when one has parted and left so much unsaid, exasperates the quivering sensitiveness which prefers silence, even, to the agony of separation and misunderstanding. Thus, when Gabrielle and Albert met on the morrow, they at once and instinctively knew that the constraint of the previous evening still subsisted, that in each other's presence they were paralysed. In the depths of her look was still manifest the apprehension of which he now knew the cause only too well, whilst his eyes, his forehead, his whole being wore an aspect of uncomplaining, patient sadness, the mute reproach of which was more bitter to her than any complaint. They followed their customary practice of breakfasting in Madame Darras' room. As usual she remained in bed, charming in her dainty bed-jacket, her beautiful hair simply dressed. Whilst they breakfasted at the little table by the bedside, it was her habit to talk over all her plans, great and small, with her husband. To-day this reminder of their long and tender intimacy hurt them both by the contrast it evoked of what had been and what was. Again, each had the clear perception of the other's suffering. But how is it possible to speak aloud of such emotions? Tacitly, they confined the conversa-

tion to the one point on which they were sure of agreement.

"Lucien will probably sent for some more clothes," said Darras. "I would advise you to see the messenger yourself if I am not in."

"Why?" she asked.

"To ascertain his address. I know that he is too proud to withhold it. We want to be able to send him his monthly allowance if matters are not settled as promptly as we hope. With twelve pounds a month he will be able to live without getting into difficulties; he will see, too, that our feelings are unchanged, that his home is always open to him. I only advise this as a measure of precaution, as I hope that everything will be settled before the end of the month."

The emotion with which Gabrielle thanked him seemed to close rather than to open his heart, and he hurriedly left the room. Happily for her, pressing household duties prevented her from dwelling too much on the significance of her husband's new attitude towards her son. Darras was about to show as much zeal, as much delicacy of feeling in Lucien's cause as heretofore. But he had not forgiven him; he did not mean to forgive him. All the more was it necessary to spare a man so cruelly wounded any fresh annoyance. She knew what stress he laid upon her strict accomplishment of all her social duties. It was Saturday, her at-home day. She paid more than usual at-

tention to details which as a rule were rather tedious to her, decorating the drawing-room with flowers, ordering the refreshments, and dressing. Thus the hours of that day were spent and Gabrielle felt relieved at being able to calm the fever of her mind by manual occupations and afterwards by small talk with her visitors. They were to dine out, which was still another relief, and perhaps the soothing of her nerves by being compelled to divert her mind would have resulted in an overflow of affection which would have brought them together again, if during the dinner given to a minister by a senator of the Left, she had not heard across the table, in spite of the hubbub of the waiting and conversation, Darras dilating with a virulence which betrayed a bitter personal feeling on the dangers of the education given by the religious associations. He could not help looking at her as he spoke. He knew that she had heard him. The result was that their drive back was as silent as the previous evening had been, still more so, since, on saying good-night at the bedroom door before separating, the husband did not utter the tender words of reproach with which they had parted for the night twenty-four hours before. The mists of silence had become denser around them.

How long would such a position last, a position cruelly painful to both, but creating at least no new incidents? It is not by days, but by weeks and months that such crises are measured, and particularly in house-

holds like this one, where neither side is really in the wrong. On Gabrielle's part, the desire to mortify her heart, to redeem, to atone for her years of forbidden happiness—on Albert's part, the husband's wounded pride and genuine hatred for his wife's religious ideas, were in danger of prolonging indefinitely a state of expectation agonising for both. Expectation? Neither he nor she could have said of what. Sunday succeeded Saturday without any other incident except Gabrielle's departure for Mass with Jeanne. Looking back from the street she could see Darras' figure outlined behind a window of their house. He was watching their departure for church—the hostile citadel which threatened to swallow up his wife and daughter, his daughter and wife, all he loved on earth—and honour forbade him to put himself in opposition to practices which had dealt a mortal blow at his family life. Gabrielle felt his look fixed upon her and following her, even as she knelt before the altar. There, however, a coincidence in which she all but saw an almost supernatural encouragement, comforted her. She had the habit, usual with people who have long been absent from the church-services, of looking for the Epistles and Gospels in her prayer-book. She would read first the lessons for the day, then those of the day preceding and following. It was the fourth Sunday in Lent and she read first the passage:—"Brethren, it is written that Abraham had two sons;" then, "After these things Jesus passed to the other side

of the sea of Galilee," and turning over the next pages her eyes alighted on the Gospel for the following Thursday which tells of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain. "*And Jesus restored him to his mother*" seemed so exactly to suit her own position that it impressed her as a promise. It enabled her to bear the living reproach conveyed in her husband's appearance behind the curtain; to meet him on her return without an utter sinking of the heart within her; to bear the weight of silence during all that Sunday and all the following Monday; to accept without murmur an uncertainty which in its torturing anxiety doubled at times the sadness of her present relations with Darras. He went out that Sunday afternoon alone. Had he taken any steps? He did not tell her. On Monday he went out in the morning and in the afternoon. Had he done anything? Nothing as yet. How far had he got with the plan announced so confidently? Was he still as certain of preventing his stepson's marriage? What was he doing and what were the people doing whom he had set in motion? Gabrielle was eager to know. But what was the use of putting these questions? She would know the answer in time; and now she was sure that it would be favourable.

Such was her frame of mind when on Tuesday morning, that is to say exactly four days since the discussion with Lucien, a most unexpected incident suddenly recalled her to the brutal reality of the situation so far

as her son was concerned. By the nine-o'clock post she received a letter in an unknown handwriting and bearing a seal, the sight of which made her tremble from head to foot. On it she read the name of one of the largest firms of lawyers in Paris, at the head of which was M. de Chambault's solicitor, M. Mounier. Her emotion was so great that she could scarcely open the envelope. The solicitor merely asked permission to call that same Tuesday at half-past one to speak to Madame Darras on a matter of pressing business. Gabrielle had not the least doubt as to what was meant. She ran to her husband with the letter in her hand. Her deadly paleness frightened him, and forgetting his grievances of the preceding days he took her in his arms with an eagerness in which love alone was manifested.

"Here," she groaned, embracing him and giving him the letter: "Look. It is about Lucien and that marriage. You were mistaken and I guessed rightly. He has gone to ask the consent of——"

She stopped. M. de Chambault's name was too hard for her to pronounce at that moment of supreme indignation against the measure, so full of insult towards her, which her son had dared to take. The flash of mystic hope which had sustained her for two days was changed to a terror equally mystic. Again she beheld punishment from on high "proceeding," as the Oratorian had said, "from the fault." Her first husband was coming back into her life, striking at the very

heart of her second home, and Darras could feel her leaning on him, clutching him convulsively with her hand.

"Be calm, my love," he said as tenderly as if the tragic misunderstanding of that week had never occurred. "Rely upon me to guard and protect you." And reading the letter, he said:—"I cannot think that Lucien has acted as you think. But if he has, his rash act will be of no use to him. I have promised you that this marriage should not take place and it shall not. You will receive the solicitor at half-past one as he requests, and I shall be there. It is my duty to take your interests in hand and vindicate your rights. I am the head of the family. Once more you will see that it is a question of something else. I am morally sure of it. What you dread is impossible."

His words were too clearly belied by his whole attitude to calm in the poor woman an anxiety which Jeanne herself noticed, for when they were alone during the morning, she kissed her mother so passionately that the latter was moved, and feeling that her child guessed her sorrow and pitied her, she could not restrain the imprudent exclamation:

"Oh! my darling. You love me! You will not leave me!"

"Yes, I love you," replied the little girl, "I will not leave you, Mamma. If you promise not to be sad any more I shall make a vow on the day of my first Communion never to marry, so that I may never leave you."

CHAPTER VIII

THE UNFORESEEN

WAS this merely one of those lofty flights to which youth in its generous ardour not unnaturally soars? Or had some casual sentence set the child's mind to work, warned as she had been already by her brother's long and inexplicable absence? In any case the curious correspondence between the naïve proof of affection suggested by the child's imagination and the cause of her own disagreement with Lucien caused the poor mother still further agitation. When at the time appointed M. Mounier's card was handed to her she had worked herself into such a state of nervous excitement as to have actually lost her voice. Indeed so inaudible was the tone of the first words in which she welcomed the notary and presented him to her husband that the lawyer offered to withdraw and return when she should have somewhat recovered.

"We prefer, Sir," said Darras, "to know the object of your visit at once. You are acquainted with my title. You will address yourself to me."

"That would not be altogether in order," said M. Mounier, after a moment's hesitation, "if there were

any question of an official application. But my only object in asking Madame Darras for this interview was to be of service, and I see nothing but advantage in explaining myself before you, Sir, although the matter which I have to discuss with Madame is, from the point of view of the Code, exclusively personal to her. You know, I believe, that I am M. de Chambault's notary?"

He spoke with the elaborate courtesy peculiar to members of his profession, behind whose politeness can be readily distinguished that invincible weapon, the Code, to which he had made direct allusion. In the flash of a moment his naturally pleasant features had darkened at the engineer's decided tone of voice. He was a man of fifty-five, small and with delicate features and a very sharp eye behind his tortoise-shell pince-nez, a thorough man of the world, who had always been at home in the club-world and in society as well as in his own office. He changed colour slightly, but did not abandon his conciliatory accent even when Darras replied:

"I thought that the Code ruled that a married woman had nothing exclusively personal to her. But let us see, Sir, what the matter is."

"It is a proposal of marriage," said the notary, "made by M. Lucien de Chambault, and for which he must ask the consent of Madame Darras."

"He has asked for this consent," interrupted Darras, "and we have refused to give it."

"Here, Sir," urged M. Mounier, "I find myself obliged to recall my remarks of a minute ago. This is one of the very rare cases in which your personality cannot intervene in any manner, legally at least. You will excuse my emphasising a point that is possibly painful. Madame Darras was a divorced woman when you married her. Now the divorce has no retrospective effect. The law may indeed declare the marriage dissolved, but dissolution is not annulment. M. Lucien de Chambault is the son of M. de Chambault and the lady who was Madame de Chambault. For the time being she becomes Madame de Chambault again. Being under twenty-five years of age the young man cannot marry without asking the consent of his parents, divorced or not, in accordance with Article 148, and his mother has no need of any authority to reply to his request."

"Well, Sir," corrected Darras, "Madame Darras has refused her consent."

"So I understood," returned the notary, "and that is the reason of my visit. I must first remind you, Sir, and Madame Darras herself that this refusal on her part has no prohibitive character. Article 148 is very clear: in case of disagreement between two parents, the father's will prevails."

"Even if the divorce was granted against him?" interrupted the second husband. "And if the custody of the child has been withdrawn from him? Impossible."

"Yes, even so," replied M. Mounier. "With or without the custody of the child the power of the father remains intact."

"But why?" cried Darras. "Do you mean to tell me that when society by its courts of law has ruled that a father is incapable of properly bringing up his daughter or his son, and the mother alone has devoted herself to their education, that then, in so critical a question as the choice of a husband or a wife, it is the will of the unworthy father which is to decide? That is monstrous. . . ."

"Illogical," said the notary, "but not unreasonable. It is a relic from the old law which ordained that once a family always a family. Indeed the first family is not entirely destroyed even by divorce, for the right of inheritance remains. The power of the father corresponds to this permanence of the right to inherit. It is the principle of paternal authority as inalienable, except in certain particular instances of forfeiture, which the law has maintained in this form. There lies the clearly marked distinction which I mentioned to you previously, between dissolving and annulling. There is, however, one qualification. The legislator foresaw the possibility of your 'unworthy' father refusing to consent to a marriage desired by the mother, out of spite at being deprived of the custody of the child. The third Article of the law of the 20th June, 1896, provides: If the parents divorced or separated fail to agree,

the consent of that parent in whose favour the divorce or separation was decreed shall be sufficient. So, if Madam Darras consented to her son's marriage and M. de Chambault objected, Madame Darras' view would be decisive. But Madame Darras refuses, while the father consents. Accordingly the father succeeds. You may perhaps consider that there is a contradiction here and that these different provisions of the law are somewhat hard to reconcile. You know the assemblies in which these so-called reforms in the Code are drafted are not recruited from specialists. . . ."

"The law is the law, Sir, and I am ready to obey it whatever it says," drily replied Darras. He added, "I suppose that this is preliminary to the announcement that M. Lucien de Chambault has asked his father's consent and has obtained it?"

"Exactly, Sir," replied the notary. "At the request of my client, M. de Chambault père, I visited his residence and drew up the authentic document which states that he gives his consent to the marriage of his son Lucien with Mlle. Bertha Planat. One formality remains to be completed. The Code requires that a second authentic document shall be drawn up to embody, Madame, your refusal. To be strictly regular I should have attended here accompanied by one of my colleagues or two witnesses and provided with a deed of application to serve upon you. Though there is absolutely nothing objectionable in this method of pro-

cedure, it may seem an annoyance and is liable to be resented. I thought it better to make this preliminary application to you, and my client encouraged me. Doubtless, Madame, you do not know that M. de Chambault is ill, very ill. The doctors suspect pneumonia following on an attack of liver. In my opinion, and I think it my duty to speak quite frankly to you, the end is near. It is only a question of weeks, perhaps of days. He is in extremis. When Death is so close, many things appear in a different light. His son's visit, the way in which the young man spoke, the feelings he showed have touched the father's heart. He said yes to his request. But he is not at peace. He is anxious that you should not consider his consent as a fresh wrong to you. Past wrongs have been many and great . . . he admits it. I think, Madame, that if you withdraw your practically useless veto on this consent of a dying man, for I repeat he is doomed, it will be an act of charity. I have no right to bring forward other arguments. But your son has become my client by the simple fact of his father's referring him to me, and I feel myself justified, in the name of his future, in expressing the hope that he may not enter on married life with a slur that is very hard on a young couple at the outset of their career. . . . That is my apology for a step which M. Darras will I am sure excuse."

The mother had listened to what the notary said without offering any remark. Her eyes, fixed on her

husband, had in turn expressed the varying feelings which had risen in her mind—astonishment when M. Mounier had declared she was independent of her present husband to give or refuse consent; terror when she learnt that actually, according to the Code, her own wishes counted for nothing against the will of the real father; all the sorrow of misunderstood affection when she heard that Lucien, after all that he knew of their divorce and its causes, had appealed to this father; shock at the news of the serious illness of the wretch who had victimised her in her youth; culminating in genuine indignation at the idea of his daring to send her a message, even from his deathbed. She had been able to see from his gaze that similar emotions were affecting Darras. The features of her second husband had grown visibly darker when the notary spoke of the indestructible character of the family in olden times, and of the inconsequent manner in which laws are made and unmade in our present-day anarchy. He spoke, however, calmly, like a man who is anxious to reach a definite conclusion:

“We have nothing, Sir, to excuse, we owe you thanks. I am certain that I speak for Madame Darras when I beg of you to repeat to the two persons from whom you come that her refusal is absolute and will remain so,”—Gabrielle made a slight gesture of assent,—“because it involves certain points of honour—I am sure, M. Mounier, that you know nothing of these and that your

principal client is equally in the dark. I will ask you, since you have constituted yourself his intermediary, to be good enough to carry my words to him. If you will allow me, I will give you chapter and verse in the shape of precise information concerning this Mlle. Planat whom my stepson is bent on marrying. . . .”

“I cannot follow you over this ground,” interrupted the notary. “M. de Chambault did not communicate to me the reasons he had for consenting to his son’s marriage and I do not wish to know Madame Darras’ possible motives in not consenting. The father is entitled up to the last day to revoke the authority he has given, and in that event M. Lucien, being only twenty-three, will not be able to marry for two years. Please entrust to others any communication you may have for M. de Chambault. If your resolve, Madame, is not to be shaken, I shall have the honour to wait on you again under the conditions which I mentioned before. In order to leave you all reasonable time for reflection, this will not be for eight days.”

“Everything has been considered,” said Gabrielle in her turn. An idea had flashed across her brain and gave her the energy to speak. “In eight days M. Darras and I shall think exactly as we think to-day.”

No sooner had the notary left the room than, quite pale but with her mind made up, she said to her husband, “ask if the carriage is there. Time presses and there is not a minute to lose. I must go to M. de

Chambault, I must see him and explain. Lucien has deceived him. No father, not even he, could desire such a marriage for his son. He does not know the truth. . . .”

“No,” replied Darras, “he does not. I am equally sure of that. But I must go to him, not you. . . .”

“You?” cried she in amazement.

“Yes, I,” he replied. “I cannot bear to think of your seeing again this man who caused you so much suffering. I forbid you.” She detected in his tone that touch of command and asperity which she had noticed of late. “My twelve years,” he continued, “of devotion to Lucien have given me the right to go, to protect his future against any and every one. If his illness has really aroused in M. de Chambault such feelings as we have just been assured, my action will make clear to him how serious the situation is. That is the proper way to nip this marriage in the bud. In an hour’s time he will have revoked his consent. Good-bye, dearest; say nothing. Wait for my return and do not be anxious and restless. The danger will be averted for two years, as the notary told you. And I do not want two years for the project I have talked to you about; two or three weeks at most will be enough. If there is any fatality about the matter it is now in our favour, as chance has chosen to warn us in time. Had not this notary been as scrupulous as he evidently is, we should not have known at all how to parry this blow. Do not

doubt it. He suspected the truth and he came to point out to us, as far as he could, how to act. . . .”

“Perhaps you are right,” said she. And then in tender accents in which he recognised her just as he had long known her, so loving, so yielding, so entirely his own: “Ah, Albert, my dearest, hasten to end it all, hasten to rescue him, and as for me,” she added in a low voice, “forgive me.”

A strong flood of passionate feeling surged in the heart of Darras at Gabrielle's farewell words. He took them to show that she had come back to him, and the satisfaction this thought gave rise to sustained him during all the time he was crossing from the rue du Luxembourg to the Place François 1er where Chambault lived. The bitterness of this visit had suddenly passed from his sight, it had even been turned to sweetness by the cry of love coming after those four days, those four horrible silent days. Only one thing could he grasp: his wife, his dear wife, was his, entirely his, once again. Her entreaty for forgiveness was her renunciation of the madness of the past few days, and the token that she would again enter, nay, had already entered, into the true meaning of their relations. Let him succeed in his present mission and the crisis would be averted. Instead of seeing in the sequence of these recent events the action of a correcting Providence directed against their home, she would discern, as he had told her, the play of chance veering finally in their favour. Once

he had recovered her, it would be his aim never more to let the fatal poison overpower her tortured sensitiveness.

The intoxication of hope was gone in a moment when he found himself in front of the first husband's house. He knew it only too well. From the day when he married the divorced wife of Edgar de Chambault, Darras had never been entirely indifferent to that man. During the first years the necessity of sending Lucien to him on certain days had kept up some compulsory connection. Later, Chambault's carelessness had allowed even these last ties with his old life to drop. It will be remembered—and Madame Darras had made use of the fact to justify herself with Father Euvrard—that the divorce proceedings had originated with the husband, and that he had remarried long before she did. His second wife had died, and after this bereavement he had become more and more degraded in his tastes. His debaucheries had become matters of common knowledge and satisfied the mother that she had a right to put a stop to her son's visits: the boy had on several occasions found his father half drunk and in very bad company. Chambault had not protested. From that time the Darras had had no news of him except at second hand. Sometimes it was a passing remark from one of his cousins, the old General de Jarden who had openly taken Gabrielle's side and continued to visit her, even after her remarriage. Sometimes they came across a simple reference in a newspaper to some stay

at Nice or at Aix-les-Bains. Chambault had come into a second fortune from an uncle, after having almost completely squandered the first, and at nearly sixty years of age he still kept his place among the *habitués* of Parisian gay life. Lucien used to pay him a visit every New Year's day. He was received or not as it happened to turn out. But whether he saw or did not see his miserable relative, he always returned with exact particulars as to his residence for the time being, whether he was in Paris or away, and often with tales of his temper, which had come to be more uncertain and savage with advancing years. Not one of these little details but had touched the husband's successor in that dark and secret corner of the heart where we keep the living image of our real enemies, not those against whom we merely have to struggle, who seek to do us harm and whom we repay in kind, but those whose very existence causes us almost unbearable pangs from the fact that they are alive, quite apart from any personal contact. How often, for instance, when Chambault was living in the Place François 1er, had Darras ordered his coachman to choose another road, when a chance drive took him in that direction and it would have been the natural road to take. At other times, angry with himself at the unworthy weakness of this recoil from a painful impression, he would even go out of his way to cross the little square and have a look at the house, a three-storied building with a little railed-in garden. The

entrance to the house faced the rue Jean-Goujon. Darras knew that Chambault lived on the entresol. It was poignant torture to him to reflect on the thoughts of this man to whom his wife had come as a maiden, on the images he kept in his memory, the blood-rights which in spite of everything he still possessed over Lucien. He tried to picture him, having seen him only in portraits. The sight of a passer-by making for the door made his heart jump. He shrugged his shoulders in scorn of this unwholesome curiosity, as in self-condemnation he called it. The hidden wound bled none the less. How deep it lay and how little time had done to heal it! He could answer for that, for he felt the smart again, as he stepped from his carriage under the windows behind which, if the notary spoke the truth, the former tormentor of Gabrielle's youth was perhaps in his last agony. But he had been her first husband, and could his death do away with that? However, though his incurable jealousy of the past from which he had suffered so much made Darras feel somewhat ill, yet at the moment and in spite of his pressing preoccupations it did not prevent him from walking unhesitatingly to the lodge. In a steady voice he asked: "Is M. de Chambault in?" as if he knew nothing of the illness, whose serious symptoms were however forced on his notice by the ominous sign of the straw that had been strewn on the ground in front of the house to deaden the noise of the street.

"The Count is in," replied the doorkeeper, "but he will certainly not be able to see you, Sir. He was in great pain yesterday, and to-day his condition is worse."

"Well, I will go up to his rooms," said Darras, "and see his servant."

The fact that no instructions had been given to the doorkeeper was a further indication of the state of things; it pointed to the disorganisation which accompanies the unexpected supervening of dangerous complications in the course of an illness considered at first to be rather slight. Though M. Mounier's words had prepared the visitor to find the patient suffering from a very bad attack, he concluded that the situation had evidently developed to an alarming degree.

Was there still time to see Chambault, and would the invalid be able to bear an interview which demanded considerable clearness of mind and some exertion? Darras could not help asking himself this question, at the scared looks of the footman who came to the door to answer his ring. The more reason to persist and if possible extract a written disavowal of the consent that had been given. Admitting, what he had neglected to verify, that Lucien had already given the first public notice of his intended marriage at the town hall, the marriage could not yet take place for eleven or twelve days. In the meantime the father might become worse. Darras overcame the servant's scruples by saying that

he had been sent by the notary M. Mounier on a matter of great urgency, and he prevailed on the man to take in his card. The five minutes he passed alone in the hall waiting for the reply were agony to him. Scattered everywhere were too many indications of the character and habits of the man on whom perhaps depended the future of his own home, the man who had been so distressingly involved in his past life. Yet it was only the ordinary anteroom to the flat of a rich bachelor, displaying the somewhat ostentatious luxury of a modern man of the world. But these very tokens of a life of pleasure awakened almost physical repugnance in such a Puritan as Darras still remained. Two pictures of vaguely suggestive nakedness were hung one on each side of the door. Opposite to them were two long panels of old plate glass which reflected the rosy tints of the painted flesh on the canvas. On the walls were also numerous programmes of sporting and other entertainments, carefully framed, as if the comic figures sketched and coloured with which the list of promised amusements was illustrated, represented cherished recollections. English engravings of steeplechases alternated with large photographs, one of them signed, of ladies in loud costumes, whose profession it was impossible to doubt. A gun case was evidence of the tastes of a sportsman, while another rack, filled with canes, pointed to the pretensions of an old beau! There was a heap of visiting cards in a cup. Absently Dar-

ras took up four or five. As it happened, his hand fell on a courtesan's card. He read, scribbled in pencil: "Dinner, this evening." He well knew this was how Chambault lived. Yet for some reason this suggestion of somewhat unrefined but after all quite inoffensive habits filled him with melancholy, but he had no time to give way to it, for the footman returned with a reply in the negative:

"The Count would have been glad to see you, Sir, but he is worse at the moment, and the person who was sent by the doctor absolutely forbids it."

"Cannot I see M. de Chambault's son?" said Darras, who wanted to know whether Lucien had anything to do with this refusal.

"He went out an hour ago to see a great doctor whom they wish to have in consultation. He will be back soon."

"And the person whom you mentioned, who is in attendance on the invalid?" questioned Darras. "Give my card and ask if she will see me for a minute." A suspicion had crossed his mind. The phrase used by the footman enabled him to guess that a woman was referred to. Why had he not said simply: the nurse? Darras at once thought of one of the creatures whose visiting cards on the tray and whose portraits on the walls in the anteroom attested their intimacy with the owner of the flat. No, Lucien would not have put up with such characters. He had passed the night there.

He had gone to seek a celebrated consulting doctor. Evidently, as was otherwise natural, he had as the son of the house taken in hand the direction of affairs inside. What if this person installed at the dying man's bedside, by the doctor's and the son's authority, were Bertha Planat in her capacity of medical student? Why not? The idea, thus abruptly suggested to him, had at once resulted in his very strange request. "I am mad," said the enquirer to himself when the servant had departed towards the bedroom with the second message: "if it is she, she will not see me; and if it is some one else, what is the use?" His impulsive action was so foreign to his character and so little in keeping with his plans that he stood astonished at himself. In reality he had obeyed a nervous impulse such as an accumulation of obstacles speedily causes in men of his type, accustomed to go straight to their object. He had thought it so easy to break off the connection between Lucien and this girl. But when it came to the point he had been confronted by the unexpected. The presence of Bertha here, if here she really was, had suddenly suggested to him the opportunity for a decisive interview, and he had seized it instinctively, almost madly. Was this the place or time to enter on the bargain with her which he had conceived as one of the possible means to a final settlement? And where was the sense in his request for an interview, if not to arrive at this disgusting but necessary bargain? The

sense? It was simply a chance to find himself at last face to face with his enemy. He would know exactly what she wanted and to what extent she wanted it. And then, unconsciously, Darras came under the influence of the feelings his stepson expressed towards this lady. At their first battle Lucien had not been able altogether to scout his opinion, and Darras for his part was no more capable of entirely disregarding the view of the younger man. They were too accustomed to esteem one another. The stepfather was fully persuaded that Bertha was an adventuress. And yet, at bottom, his stepson's belief in her did not leave him so calm and so assured in his conviction as the implacable energy which he showed in the matter would seem to suggest. There was only a very slight suspicion of doubt, imperceptible to himself. But this was enough to affect his conscience, characterised as it was by a passion for truth, with a boding sense of uneasiness, which changed to irritation closely akin to anger, when, the footman having returned and having ushered him into the drawing-room to wait for the person whom he had asked for and who was coming, he saw appear Mlle. Planat.

She indeed it was, with that delicate profile and those distinctive features which had struck him so greatly when he had seen her sitting with Lucien at the creamery in the rue Racine. The nurse's pinafore which she had put on over her dress, in order to attend to her business, accentuated the excessive gravity of her

pretty face, pale from study and framed as before in masses of auburn hair, smoothly parted and gathered behind into a thick plait. Her brown eyes had the same look in them, direct and cold in its polite intentness, before which at their first meeting Darras' gaze had been compelled to drop. It was the true surgeon's look, steady and penetrating, telling that the mind is summoning all its powers to see clearly and adapt its activities to the facts with no thought of anything else. Yet Bertha was much affected at the moment. The bringing of Darras' card to the sick man had at once thrown him into a state of excitement which had dismayed her more than the threatening riddle of this visit. When the footman had returned bringing back this same card and asking for her, her instinctive impulse had been to refuse. Then she had risen to follow the servant. She had not wished Lucien's stepfather to imagine that she was afraid of this interview. Why avoid it? Her conscience did not reproach her with anything as regards this man, of whom on the contrary she had much to complain. If her heart beat very fast as she came into the room, her brow and mouth and eyes displayed the proud air with which so often in these last five years she had met the slights of those who knew her history and ignored her. She was the first to speak: "You asked to see me, Sir—I will merely beg you to state as briefly as possible the object of your visit. M. de Chambault is too ill for me to be

able to leave him for long. Until his son returns he has no one with him but me."

"I know, Mademoiselle," replied Darras aggressively, "the servant came to tell me also that M. de Chambault had been willing to see me and you had taken upon yourself to forbid it."

"I took nothing upon myself, Sir," replied Bertha with gentle firmness. "My will does not count, does not exist.—The doctor who is treating the invalid strongly recommended that all excitement should be avoided. As it was, he suffered a violent shock merely from reading your name on the card.—In these circumstances it became my strictest professional duty to forbid your visit. Some weeks ago M. de Chambault was attacked by alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver. On Saturday he caught a chill and pneumonia supervened. To-day is the third and most critical day. It causes him horrible pain to speak. He has already been unconscious several times and is threatened with delirium which would not improbably carry him off. In his state any upset to the nervous system is extremely serious. Consider yourself, I repeat, if from the professional point of view, I could allow this interview."

She had spoken in a clear voice, affecting to employ extremely precise technical terms, as if, instead of addressing her lover's unfriendly stepfather, an opponent who had intervened in so threatening a manner in her life drama, she had been detailing a diagnosis in

front of one of the beds at the public hospital, to a crowd of attentive students in attendance on Professor Louvet. The immediate result of her self-control had been to intensify Darras' already profound aversion to her. It was impossible for him to find anything to criticise in the young lady's attitude, which was at once dignified and polite, distant and yet courteous. But was it not precisely this command of hypocrisy that was the cause of the unhappy Lucien's ruin? Thus, it was in accents of irony, almost of spite, that he replied: "It is very unfortunate, Mademoiselle, for both of us that these professional considerations coincide so astonishingly with motives of personal interest."

"I do not understand you, Sir," said Bertha. The blood mounted to her cheeks, but her look remained so steady that her interrogator felt the kind of revulsion that we experience when confronted by the brazen impertinence of too incautious denials. He wanted to confound the schemer with the unquestionable evidence of facts and he retorted rudely: "You understand me perfectly and you know very well why I am here. But to put a stop to all misunderstanding I will be precise in my turn: my stepson Lucien de Chambault wishes to marry you. He asked my wife's consent and she has refused; now, taking advantage of a badly drafted statute, he reckons to go on as if nothing had happened, armed with his father's acquiescence. I came to enquire whether the father has really been informed of

the reasons which dictated Madame Darras' refusal, as I had every ground for doubt; I am now quite sure that he has not. Your preventing me from going near him is the clearest of proofs. I shall be able to find means of acquainting him, in spite of you."

"In spite of me?" she repeated. "You charge me with such baseness as that? By what right? All the things you said to Lucien, you might have believed that I deserved them! But this?—Remain, Sir, I wish it; remain until the doctor comes. You shall ask him if you may see the invalid. He may give you permission on his own responsibility; I cannot. However cruelly you insulted me my professional conscientiousness would force me to answer, 'No, you shall not see M. de Chambault at present.' But it is terrible to be so misjudged when you are doing no more than your duty."

"How else would you have me judge you?" cried Darras. The young girl's tone betrayed such intense pain, and such wounded sincerity, that his heart misgave him. But he only resumed more harshly: "You talk of professional conscientiousness. If you are not conscientious in ordinary life, you are no better in your profession. Yes or no, has Lucien done what I said? Yes or no, has he done it with your consent? possibly by your advice? Yes or no, are you preparing to force your way into a family which does not want you and has too convincing reasons for not wanting you? I

have not sought this meeting; but since chance has brought us face to face I will at least take the opportunity to tell you what Lucien has no doubt hidden from you, my wife's and my own definite and irrevocable resolve. You will succeed perhaps in marrying Lucien, though I have made up my mind to use every means to prevent it—yes; every means. But neither my wife nor I will ever see you. You will never be one of our family; never, you understand—never. You will have made Lucien an outcast from his home, you will not have entered it yourself.”

“Lucien has hidden nothing from me, Sir,” she replied more sadly still. “I knew your opinion of me and Madame Darras; I shall not try to change it. I know too from Lucien that justice is your creed, your religion. You are, however, unjust at present, very unjust; but it is out of the question for me to prove it to you. I will not try,” she persisted, shaking her head with an air of resignation. “But there is one of your assertions which I must protest against. The idea of this marriage did not come from me. No, I had no thought of entering your family; so much you might have ascertained by questioning Lucien. But of course you would not believe even him; you would imagine that I had played a part with him. How can I prove that I speak the truth?”

“By giving up this marriage unconditionally,” said Darras. More and more as this strange interview pro-

ceeded he began to be impressed with the honesty of his antagonist. Strictly, in accordance with his principles, such a conviction should have disarmed the vigour of his antagonism. But, with all his theorising, he remained a thorough middle-class Frenchman, and on the contrary the possible good faith of his stepson's sweetheart merely suggested a means to him of parting the two young people: "Yes," he persisted, "if you are speaking the truth, act accordingly; if the idea of marriage did not originate with you, it ought, as things stand, to make you shudder. You do not banish a son from his mother, and for life; that would be too wicked."

"I have not separated them," said Bertha quickly, "It is not I," she repeated. "No more have I sought this meeting, which is more painful to me than to you, Sir. Perhaps, however, it is better after all that it should have taken place and that you have spoken to me in such a way as to justify me in keeping nothing back. Examine yourself and ask yourself whether, if I passed out of his life, Lucien would return to you, to you and his mother; whether he would really be one at heart with you? M. Darras, you know too well he would not. You know what I say is true, you know it is true. I have pondered much during these last few days, I assure you; I have thought of Lucien carefully. I love him deeply, passionately. But if I believed that his happiness was to be served by the sacrifice of my

love, I should have the strength to do it and to leave him for his own sake. I wanted to do so and then I felt that I must not because he has no one but me. Where is Lucien's family that you talk about? At your house? Why, then, does he rush to Paris, mad with anxiety because of the man who lies at the point of death in his room? Three days ago he thought that this man was nothing to him. He was his father, with all a father's rights in law as you have yourself admitted, and in nature as his son's distress proves. If you have two families, you have none; and he has none. You know that this is the truth and it is not I who am to blame. Were I to disappear he would only have further cause of resentment against you for having robbed him of the one heart which is all his own. For his it is entirely, with none to share. I shall be his family and he mine. We shall be enough for one another; those were his words to me when he came back to me after having learnt through you all that I had wanted to hide from him. It was for his sake that I would have kept it all back, for his sake entirely—I was wrong—I did not know how much he loved me until that moment. Let him live his own life, M. Daras. . . . I will go further: you *must* let him—Are you sure you have not lived your own at his expense?"

Hardly had she finished her closing sentence, which hit her listener hard, when an incident which neither of them had been expecting occurred to give singular

point to her very apposite conclusion. Every sentence had touched Darras to the quick, but at every sentence a voice within him had replied "It is true," to the words in which the accused girl had demolished the indictment and suddenly taken her stand as prosecutor. He was, however, on the point of replying and with as much violence as he had shown to his stepson on a previous occasion when the latter had, on other lines, equally questioned his position as the husband of a divorced woman. The words were stopped on his lips by a ring at the bell, which by its force and abruptness betrayed the nervous impatience of the new arrival.

"It is Lucien," said Bertha, clasping her hands with an expression of distress which formed a contrast to her previous firmness, as if she had lost her energy as soon as she was no longer alone on the boards.

"Do not show yourself, Sir, I beg of you. Think where you are."

"It is for him to think where he is," replied the stepfather. "There is no cause for concealment in this visit; as he behaves, so shall I."

The nurse's intuition had not played her false. Lucien's voice was heard in the anteroom; he was questioning the servant who opened the drawing-room door for him. He saw the man whom he had for so long called his father, and the girl whom he called his betrothed, facing one another, their eyes still sparkling and their features disordered from the hurried and

tragic dialogue which had just passed. He made a slight gesture of surprise which, after the discussion which had ended in his departure from his mother's house, might easily have turned to active passion. He hardly gave a look to his sweetheart's traducer who had ventured to pursue her and him even here. His devouring anxiety was stronger than the reminder of his grudge. He walked straight to Bertha, and, as if he had not noticed Darras, said:

"Well! how has the hour passed? Has he had another crisis?"

"No," replied she. "The oppression is very great, but he is fully conscious."

"Louvet is following me," rejoined the young man, "I found him in his consulting room. His hours were nearly over. I have warned the other doctor. They will be here in twenty minutes. Have you injected morphia?"

"Yes," replied Bertha, "and I have done the cupping. What does Louvet think? Did you explain the case to him as I told you?"

"Word for word. He thinks that to-night will be very critical, but naturally he cannot give an opinion without having seen. I am going to the sick-room; is he alone?"

"He has been for the last ten minutes. . . . I am coming back too."

Lucien left the room as he had entered it without a

word to Darras, without even looking at him. Bertha followed him, first saying almost in a whisper, "Oh! Sir, please go!" Her voice still trembled from the effect of the fright that had come over her at the sudden encounter between the two men. However, no scene had come of it. And why? Because Lucien for the time being, as she had put it, was mad with anxiety. His real father was all in all to him. The man who had brought him up and whose name his mother bore did not count, once the son had been brought to realise the mortal danger of his real father, and the voice of consanguinity made itself heard within him, a single, sovereign, all-powerful appeal. Both law and nature, to quote Bertha's phrase again, had brought him back to Chambault. The feeling that his own marriage had been a failure which had come with such bitterness on Darras at the time of his wife's religious remorse, became so oppressive to him in this, the first husband's room, that he could not bear to remain there any longer. Had the sick man asked to speak with him now, he would have refused to enter the chamber of death, shrinking from seeing his stepson there lavishing affection on the dying man. He had no right to condemn that affection, for the most criminal of fathers is a father still. He could not wonder at it, for the approach of death brings very close together the spirits of the dying and those who watch. Supposing that a wave of pity had arisen in Lucien, sweeping away and

burying everything, all the causes for legitimate resentment, all the stern judgments which the past had deserved, could he fail to honour him for it? Apart from the narrowness of certain of his views, Darras was too magnanimous not to bow before this overwhelming renewal of filial piety. Yet of all the various feelings which he had detected in the young man during this melancholy visit, this tendency had been most peculiarly and completely repulsive to him. The trouble was not diminished by his growing doubts as to the equity of the methods he had employed with regard to Bertha Planat. He had not hesitated to deal any blow at her, so convinced was he that she was a dangerous schemer. Was she really so? The conversation she had had with him pursued him with an increasing remorse the further he went from the scene of their encounter. He saw her again, and her straight and piercing look. He heard her, and her frank and open voice. What if, after all, he had been mistaken in her and Lucien were right? His loyalty would never have pardoned him for hiding from Gabrielle that his conviction had suffered a shock which had partly destroyed it; and he came to the point at once when, having returned to the house in the rue du Luxembourg, he found her waiting for him in a fever of anticipation. She had been watching for him at the window and burst upon him halfway up the stairs:

“You have seen him?” she asked. “What did he

reply? Does he withdraw his consent? Tell me, tell me quickly."

"I did not see him," he replied, "his condition was too grave. But I saw Lucien."

"No! Did you? And what was said?"

"Nothing. He made as if he did not recognise me. I saw Mlle. Planat too."

"Bertha Planat? Lucien dared to install Bertha Planat by his father's bedside?"

"I must do her the justice to say that she seems to be tending him with much intelligence and devotion. I had a talk with her," he resumed after a moment's silence. "My poor darling, suppose I had been unjust in the past!"

"What do you mean?" asked Gabrielle.

"That I found her very different from what I expected. She displayed in those few minutes intelligence, firmness, and clearness. Now, we must wait for the result of the enquiries that I am having made at the office."

"You, too," groaned the mother, "are you going to take her side, and turn and desert me? Is it possible? Do not tell me, Albert, that you will ever consent to this marriage. It is not true. If that is so, what a trial it will be for me. How humiliating!"

"It will not be so at present, at any rate," interrupted Darras. "My visit has given me the impression that the sick man has very few days to live, possibly

only a few hours. If he dies this week his consent becomes invalid. Everything then will depend on you."

"A few hours," repeated Gabrielle. "Is it possible?"

There was such sad earnestness in her exclamation, and her eyes expressed such sorrowful dismay, that Darras allowed the conversation to drop. He thought he had detected fresh evidence of the inefficacy of the second marriage to combat the indestructible influence of the first. As soon as the wretched Chambault was in danger his son had resumed all the warmth and tenderness which his distant childhood had displayed towards his decadent parent. Was it the same with Gabrielle? Did the idea of the possible death of this man with whom she had lived for years, five whole years, almost half the time her present establishment had lasted, did it awake recollections in her memory which made him living to her again? Darras shuddered at the thought, and had no suspicion that far otherwise were the emotions which were racking his wife, henceforth a prey to incurable longings for the comforts of religion. Had he known her feelings, his disgust would have been no less.

At the news that this existence which had been dragged so low and squandered so riotously was nearing the end, the thought of the other life had suddenly flashed on Gabrielle. This fallen soul was going to

meet that judgment beyond the tomb which she had feared so much for herself since she had returned to belief, and in what circumstances? She had distinctly seen the chamber of death, the victim struggling in the embrace of his malady, by his side his son, Bertha Planat, a doctor . . . but no sign of a priest! Who would think of summoning the priest? Not Lucien, who was an unbeliever; not the nurse, whose character was sufficient index to her infidelity. Not the doctor, their choice of a doctor would have fallen on one of like mind with them. Not the sick man, the little religion he could have had had certainly been exhausted in his life. He had now no near relation to do him the last service of securing for him the pardon which the goodness of God reserves for the penitent at the last minute even. No near relation? What of herself? The phrase she had used to Darras when her secret had at last escaped her was not the surprised cry of a passing moment of exaltation. In the sight of the God whose dreadful sentence on the dying man would be irrevocable, she was still the unhappy man's wife. If it was any one's duty to see that he had the benefit of the last sacraments, it was hers. Yes, but she bore the name of another man. She was living with another man. Legally she was another man's wife. And she loved another man. She had glanced at him, this other man, with a prayer on the tip of her lips that he would let her go to the place from which he had come. And

she had felt incapable of framing the request, and of admitting the motive in particular. She had kept silence. The hours passed one by one. Evening followed on afternoon, night on evening. Albert and she were again alone in the study, where they had spent such long and silent evenings in the past week. This evening slipped away like the rest, without his raising his eyes from a work in which he seemed absorbed. She kept adding stitch on stitch to the needlework she had begun. Was there still time to speak? A few hours? Darras had said "a few hours," and how many were already gone! Midnight was just striking. . . . It was useless to do anything to-night. But the first thing to-morrow morning she would speak, and if she had not strength for that, would go without saying anything. She would go and find Father Euvrard. She would take him to the Place François 1er.

On this resolve and hope she slept, to be awakened the next morning by the following note from her son:

"Mother, my father died to-night. I must see you and speak to you. He asked me to do so. In accordance with his wish, he will be buried in the family vault at Villefranche d'Aveyron. On my return from the funeral I will ask you to see me. I am very unhappy and I love you. Remember that I have no one now but you." He had signed it as he used to do when a child, "Your little one."

“Ah!” she groaned, “had I but spoken yesterday, had I only gone! And it is too late. I might have saved him—I did not. Now I am lost myself. He was my husband and I was his wife. I was his wife still. My sin is too great!”

CHAPTER IX

A FAREWELL

AT least the pangs of remorse might have been spared this gentle soul, tortured by so many trials, each in turn appearing to be a direct consequence of the great mistake of her life, and strengthening her faith in proportion. Instinctively she had practised the advice given by a Father of the Church, of which Joseph de Maistre wrote that it was one of the most beautiful utterances ever delivered by the mouth of man: "*Vis fugere a Deo? Fuge ad Deum*: Wouldst thou flee God? Take refuge in His arms."

The thought that for want of a little courage she had connived at the everlasting damnation of one to whom she had formerly been bound by the most solemn of oaths, was a trial that would doubtless have been too much for her strength. The poor woman felt this herself, and looked immediately round for the means to discover whether she really would henceforth have to bear this weight on her conscience. But what means? Her son was about to start for Villefranche, if he had not already started. Besides, could she go and find him, like Darras on the previous evening, in the rooms where

Chambault had died, and run the risk of meeting with a certain Mlle. Planat? Should she wait to be quite sure that the body had been removed, and then make her way to the house when she would not then run up against Lucien or the girl, and question the household servants? Should she write to the notary, that M. Mounier who had been the first to inform her of this illness whose shocking termination marked such an epoch in her life? All these plans crossed her mind, as she read the note of her "little one," who, at this moment and all unwittingly, had once again stabbed her to the heart. She ended by adopting a roundabout method, which would, however, procure her with certainty the information she desired, and this was a matter of tragic moment to her. She wrote to that cousin of the dead man who has been already mentioned, the old General de Jardes, with whom she kept up her acquaintance. When the reply arrived, brought by a servant, it was the dinner hour. Gabrielle was at the table, and had not succeeded in hiding the anxiety whose real motive Darras hardly suspected. How could he fail to attribute it to the news received that morning, and, thus interpreting it, be otherwise than distressed himself? It was one blow the more to him, following on many others, to see Gabrielle shudder when the footman gave her the missive with the name of the sender, while in her excitement the colour rushed to her face, and her hands trembled slightly. She opened

the letter, and when she had glanced at its contents, her features again assumed a startled air.

The envelope contained a card from M. de Jardes with a word or two and the notification of Chambault's death in which occurred the words: *Provided with the sacraments of the Church*. A like return to the family-feeling had made the dying man desirous of being buried in the tomb of the ancestors whose name he had borne with so little credit, and to end as he had seen his father and mother end, though his life had been in contradiction to all the principles they had held dear. It constantly happens, particularly in the case of men of this kind, degenerate scions of a long line of believers, that at the last moment the Christian awakes in them, a phenomenon in which we may discover one proof, among a thousand others, of the great law of heredity. Every family is one and distinct. This unity is clearly attested by the graces that in moments such as these may distinguish even the disreputable descendant of a pious race, no less than by the misfortunes inflicted on the virtuous heirs of corrupted blood. The evidence, such as it is, is confusing and not very intelligible, but without it the hidden windings of the life of man would pass all understanding.

The cynical free-liver whose brutal passions had rendered their union insufferable to the most devoted and most refined of wives, and who had remarried under such dishonourable circumstances in defiance of his own

social circle, the unprincipled father who had not hidden from his son any of the scandals which attended his irregular life, the hopeless debauchee carried off before his time by a disease sown by habits of disgraceful intemperance, had on his deathbed recalled the teachings of his far-off childhood. Enlightened as to the serious condition in which he was, by the consultation which had followed on the visit of Darras, and perhaps even by the extraordinary incident of this very visit, he had asked for a priest. The priest had come and officiated. The brief terms of this farewell letter recounted the fact of this final recantation, and the other sentence: "The burial will take place in the family vault at Villefranche d'Aveyron," invested the end of a degraded man with a dignity which his habits had too little manifested. Gabrielle found relief in it from the terrible fear that had haunted her. But in spite of all, many a recollection was awakened in her by this funeral announcement containing her son's name but not her own. She was affected, and the more profoundly as she felt Albert's questioning look resting on her. She placed the letter on the table, instead of handing it to him, and dinner ended without her having made the least allusion to its contents. The sender's name, the style of paper, the mourning border, left no room for doubt. Darras watched the broad black border outlined against the white tablecloth. There was something intolerable to him in this simple sheet of paper,

visible reminder of the first husband whom he had so despised, so hated even. He looked at it, the dead man's letter, communicating its pollution to his family board, within reach of Jeanne, the child of the second marriage, and he thought: "It is the advice of that scoundrel's death, I cannot doubt it. Why does Jardes, who has always been so correct with me, send it to Gabrielle? Why is she so upset?"

He was not to get the reply to his question till dinner was over, and his heart had grown sore at the bitter reminder of that other establishment, still real, still present to the mind. Yet galling as was the interpretation of Gabrielle's worry as due to the recollection of a hateful past, would he not have preferred it to the truth? As they were going down to his study from their daughter's room, his wife said to him: "I did not say anything to you at dinner about M. de Jardes' letter because of Jeanne. I am always so afraid she may guess, what we have kept from her, that Lucien's father was alive when I married you."

"Your correspondence is your own and yours alone, as you know," replied Darras frankly.

"I want you to read this letter," she persisted: "I do not mean to take any steps again without your knowledge. I have seen you suffer too much from my silence. I gathered from your expression during dinner and after, that you had guessed what this communication was. M. de Jardes sent it to me because I had

written to him in my anxiety on a matter in which I could believe my responsibility was involved. But read."

The general's card contained only a few words to the effect that Madame Darras would find the information she desired in the funeral announcement. And on this announcement the sentence relating to the sacraments had been underlined in pencil.

"Yes," resumed Gabrielle, "you told me yesterday that there was danger. I had too good reason to think that no one in the poor man's circle would call in a priest. It struck me to ask you to let me take this step myself. But I did not dare to ask. When I learnt of the death this morning, I trembled."

She did not finish. Darras had looked at the note of M. de Jardes, and then at the official notification of death. He now regarded his wife with an expression of infinite distress, and said imploringly:

"You do not seriously think that? Tell me that you do not think so!"

"What?" exclaimed she.

"That the presence of a priest at the bedside of a dying man affects the fate, whatever it be, that awaits him in the next world if there is one?"

"But, my dear, there is one," said she, "you know well there is."

"I know nothing," replied Darras, "but what has been established by science. But let us grant for a

moment that this other world does exist. Let us grant a judgment after death, though the idea of putting a premium on virtue is subversive of the higher morality. This judgment, if it is to be equitable, must take into account the life as a whole. How can it be influenced by the gestures and the words of a surpliced man at the side of a semi-defunct body hardly retaining enough consciousness to think or enough breath to speak?"

"It is enough that he can repent," replied Gabrielle, "and unite in the sacrifice to the merits of the Saviour. That is the whole Christian faith, that redemption of such poor sinners as we are by the sufferings which Jesus Christ underwent for us. The priest's gestures and words are only the means of the sacrament. Oh!" she continued, in an inspired tone, "how is it you do not admire that conception, even though you may not believe in it, you, who are so fond of lofty ideals? That goodness from on high ever ready to forgive us, whatever we have done, if we will but pray for pardon in the name of the Righteous One who was willing to die that we may live, and we live only in Him."

"We live only in our conscience," corrected Darras. "You ask me why I fail to admire that conception, even without believing in it? Because it is the negation of conscience, that is why. This Saviour, as you admit, is a substituted victim, that is to say the embodiment of injustice, if ever there was one."

"No," broke in Gabrielle more passionately than be-

fore, "not that, but the embodiment of love, of infinite love."

"Do not let us discuss it, my dear," said Albert, then, after a moment's silence, he took her hand and added in a tone of tender and indulgent reproach, "How happy we were when we thought alike! You look back regretfully, don't you, to those long evenings when neither of us spoke a word but had its echo in the mind and heart of the other, when we were so devoted?"

"We shall think alike once again some day on all points," said she in a rapt manner, "I am sure of it, quite sure. And this time we shall have found the truth. As for devotion, I have proved too well how far I loved, and yet I shall love you one day soon more than ever before, because then I shall have the right to love you."

What was the exact meaning of these dark sayings? Darras feared to comprehend them. He did not provoke any further remarks, and Gabrielle vouchsafed none. The impulse which had brought him back to his wife had spent its force. He dropped those feverish little hands which were squeezing his in a grip in which he read not the passion of love but the effort of a will determined on the mastery. Suddenly there revived in his heart the implacable aversion he professed for the beliefs represented by the Church. It had just been brought home to him that he had been mistaken in the gravity of the religious crisis through which his wife

had passed. It was no mere question of superstitious terror awakened by the events of the last few days, the quarrel between stepfather and stepson and the latter's determined recalcitrance. It was Faith that he had to face, a moral phenomenon more disconcerting and annoying than any other to minds built like his own. The struggle between the species, that inflexible law of the animal world, has its exact analogy in the world of ideas. Certain bents of mind constitute genuine intellectual species which cannot exist together side by side. An encounter means strife and a duel to the death. Convictions, seemingly the most abstract, are living principles quite ready to display destructive energy against principles opposed to them. The fighting instinct soon succeeds in involving the whole personality. Indeed, diametrically opposite lines of thought on certain essential points must always result in mutual hatred, though the parties in other respects may be as devoted to each other as were Gabrielle and Albert. The latter was conscious of a rising spirit of antagonism bordering on the savage, such as he had felt the previous week on the occasion of his wife's first confession. He had then had the strength to keep himself under control. Would he be so successful in the next struggle, when she would formulate in positive phraseology the demands at present concealed in the vagueness of her "because I shall then have the right"? He was afraid that henceforth she would not let herself

be carried away. To avoid such a discussion at a moment when he was hardly master of himself, he made a hurried pretence, entirely unconvincing at that time of night, of a matter of business which he had forgotten, and he left the room, and a minute or two later the house, without his wife's having offered to detain him. While he walked on and on, straight ahead through the streets, in the darkness, trying to overcome by a forced march the violent excitement into which the brief conversation had thrown him, she sat motionless under the lamp, with her hands crossed on her untouched task, and kept asking herself when she would have the courage to speak out. The words had been on her lips, and her free-thinking husband had read them there so distinctly as to gather with a sense of apprehension the unspoken menace they conveyed. Death had freed the divorced woman from her old ties. She could become Albert's wife in the sight of God and go through the religious marriage. The insurmountable obstacle had disappeared. Was it possible that Jeanne's father, who allowed the daughter to be brought up in the Catholic faith, would refuse to the mother this solemnisation of her marriage at church, the final consecration of their union? She replied "No," and yet the fear wrung her heart. If after all he refused, what then?

The feeling of which they were both conscious, that the first husband's unexpected death had affected one of the essential facts of their life, had the effect of post-

poning for a few days the discussion which each knew to be inevitable on this question of a religious marriage. In their shrinking from the interview which would have far-reaching results on their future relations, husband and wife were actuated by different motives. How could Albert have challenged a conversation which implied that this event had altered his relations with his wife, when his pride refused to allow him to admit the fact? From his point of view Gabrielle had been his wife while Chambault was living. Chambault being dead she was his wife still, and in circumstances which he chose to consider identical. Divorce, not widowhood, had emancipated her. Gabrielle, on the contrary, looked on herself as a new-made widow who had thus gained her freedom. She was quit of the stigma of the divorce from which she had suffered so greatly during the last few months. Quit? Not altogether, for the tie which bound her to Albert was as yet only that civil ceremony which in her present state of mind did not count. The idea of being married at last to this man whom she loved so dearly, by the only form of marriage in which she now believed, soothed her with hopes so sweet as to make her afraid of them. So keenly anxious was she to get his consent to this that she shrank from making her request. She did not shut her eyes to facts; the present state of things could not last. There must be an explanation. She would not doubt the success of her plan and yet she kept putting

if off. Till when? For what reason? Every day men who are unbelievers agree to marry under the forms of Christianity the girls whom they love and who would not consent to be their wife without the solemn ceremony. They do not regard themselves as dishonoured. She clung to this reasoning, arguing to herself that it would be the same with Darras. Then the knowledge she had of his character constrained her to admit the uncertainty of the analogy when he was in question. The prospect of what she must make up her mind to, supposing he refused to make their relations regular, overwhelmed her before the time. She tried to force herself not to think of it. Every morning in the week that elapsed between her son's departure and return she put the decisive battle off till the evening, and every evening till the next morning. She found an excuse for her weakness in the fact that, apart from her other troubles, she was still greatly worried about the issue of the difficulties with her son, which were merely suspended during his absence for the funeral at Villefranche. He had given her notice of a visit on his return. She expected that he would choose this occasion to renew his request for authorisation which now depended on her alone. All these years she had become so accustomed to rely on Albert in all matters of importance that she was dismayed at the outset by the prospect of embarking on this struggle without being in full accord with him. It would have been better if this matter of

her legal opposition to Lucien's marriage had been settled first. She felt, besides, considerable uneasiness at the growing distinctness of Darras' change of views on a subject on which she had found him so decided and impassioned previous to his visit to the Place François 1er and his meeting with Mlle. Planat. A struggle was going on in his mind. On the day after that evening when the notice of M. de Chambault's death had given rise to the conversation, in itself the inevitable prelude to another and a more serious discussion, she came upon a further indication of this. She had asked him whether it would not be as well to summon their notary to decide on the necessary steps to take, the father's death having cancelled the previous authorisation.

"Why annoy Lucien?" Darras had replied. "Well, yes. Wait for his visit. You will act accordingly. He can do nothing without you. Let him come. It is better for you to avoid any fresh complication. We have two full years now in front of us before he can start any legal action against you."

"Two years?" repeated the mother. "But how will these two years pass? He is well enough off already. This girl will not release her victim."

"I should have thought as you do before seeing Mlle. Planat. My sense of justice forbids me to believe, without more tangible proof, that she is false and interested. I told you just now. Her look, her voice, her attitude,

her words, everything about her surprised me. We must have the courage to revise our judgments when we are mistaken, at the risk of self-humiliation. Honesty demands it. Is it time? We shall soon have an opportunity of learning very precisely what view to adopt. She has influence over Lucien, that is certain, tremendous influence. We shall see how she will use it. I have talked with her. If by chance Lucien had formerly misled her as to our intentions, she is fully informed now. I told her what you thought and what I thought. If she has the least spark of proper feeling, she will make it a point of honour to put an end to the misunderstanding which drove Lucien away. His private means of which you spoke have this advantage, they furnish a ready excuse for his setting up for himself, so that his separate establishment may not constitute a rupture with us."

"You have no hope then that he will come back?" she asked. "You seemed so convinced of it? You promised me so decidedly?"

"I was sure of it then. Now I am less so, for a reason which ought rather to pacify your anxiety. I believed he would return, just in proportion as I was persuaded of the girl's unworthiness. But supposing the enquiry with regard to her comes to nothing. Supposing there is nothing at all in her past life! I assure you I am beginning to believe that there is nothing."

And some days later he remarked:

"I have news from the Place Beauvau. The reply has come from Clermont. The evidence they have got together is unanimous. Mlle. Planat's work and conduct throughout her training was exemplary. Her life at Paris was unscrupulously misrepresented by the Conservative professors and students in the University, for the very reason that she had been so irreproachable in preparing for her examinations. She had passed with very brilliant honours, and every one knew her ideas and those of an uncle who had brought her up and was one of the leaders of the Socialists in the town. It remains to collect information about her life in the Quartier Latin. That will be a longer business. If nothing more is discovered in that direction, beyond the intimacy which she admits, my conscience will compel me to confess myself in the wrong with regard to Lucien."

"But you will not advise me to consent to his marriage?" said the mother.

"I shall advise you to speak to your son in all earnestness, as we did on the first occasion. I myself shall tell him my present doubts, and how they have come, and the reasons why I thought first one way and then the other. We shall then have a right to ask him to be patient for the two years, and we shall be certain of not having committed any injustice. Since my conversation with the girl, that fear haunts me, and the feeling is too painful."

So Gabrielle ran the risk of having to combat Albert

as well as Lucien in the matter of this creature. The mother's aversion to the siren continued the more implacable as the wife found her own position less regular. At a given moment, carried away by the intensity of her remorse, she had gone so far as to compare her own condition, as a divorced woman who had gone through the civil ceremony of remarriage, to the irregular status of such as her son's unfortunate betrothed. In reality her inmost being revolted at the thought that such a comparison should be possible even. How she longed to make it an impossibility.

Twenty times during this week of torturing indecision had she been tempted to return to Father Euvrard, in the certainty that the old priest would order her at once to put to her husband, as the Code provided, the question which must determine him to make her his wife according to the requirements of the Church. Twenty times she rejected the idea of a visit which she must either keep from Darras, and for that she would not forgive herself, or tell him of it, when he would not pardon her for having again brought a third person between them. So she waited, and waiting, became the more anxious at the total absence of news from her son since the note, tender though that was, announcing his father's death. That he might have to prolong his stay at Aveyron, where he had henceforth some large interests, she understood. What was happening that, in this forced separation, he ceased to feel the need of

reconciliation with her? From the post in the morning to that at night she looked for a letter promising a speedy return or at least explaining his absence. The postman brought her nothing, and she lost herself in conjectures, sometimes foolish: a sudden illness which was being kept from her; the marriage with Mlle. Planat had taken place out there, through the ignorance or the complicity of some country Mayor. How did she know? New terrors assailed her at the prospect of yet more dreadful punishment for the scandal of her home life, of her long intimacy with a man whom the world and she called her husband, but who was not! She trembled and fervently resolved, come what would, to speak to Albert the very day Lucien returned. She ended by making her resolve a vow and going to Saint Sulpice to promise God she would have the courage to carry it out. So sincere was she in this that at the moment when she at last received the wished-for letter from the young man in which he announced his return to Paris and fixed his visit for the next day, she thought she would have fainted. The date had arrived and she did not entertain for a moment any idea of failure. No sooner should her son have left her than the interview with her husband should take place. The latter was by at the time and felt somewhat uneasy when he saw her sudden paleness; then, after he had been made acquainted with the note which had caused the shock, he said gently:

"You must have more control of yourself," and he added with some hesitation, "the more so as this interview will, I fear, be painful. Yes," he continued, "when I confronted Lucien at the Place François 1er, I got the impression that he was a changed man. I did not say anything to you at the time, but it is better for you to be forewarned. I am afraid that the feelings which he already entertained towards our household have become very accentuated."

"But you told me that nothing passed between you at that time?" replied the mother.

"There is no need of words between people who know one another as we do," returned Darras; "looks are enough. I would rather have seen him as we did here, violent, unjust, enraged. But he still looked on me as a friend. All his anger was merely exasperated affection."

"And the other day? Go on——"

"The other day I became aware that I was nothing to him henceforth. I have since then thought deeply of the determination to know me no longer which I distinctly read in his eyes. I will not trouble you with the conclusions I have come to. You can guess them. I may have been deceived. But if I saw correctly, this first conversation between you and him, considering where he comes from, might have some surprises in store for you. So try to be well prepared for it, and be calm, above all things calm. The circumstances are

no longer such that you need fear any desperate act on the spur of the moment. The law is on our side. Only try to keep Lucien from once more leaving this house never to return."

He said no more. Evidently the impressions which he summed up in these ambiguous sentences had been so bitter that it was painful to him to particularise further. This information corresponded too nearly with certain ideas suggested to Gabrielle by her son's silence during the last eight days. She did not try to elicit from her husband explanations which would have cost him a pang and have told her nothing.

Twenty-four hours later Lucien entered the little drawing-room where, the week before, such terrible words had passed between the three of them, and then she understood, at the first glance, that her husband had made no mistake. She was face to face with some one whom she did not altogether recognise. Present through his father's last days, he had then gone straight to the remote country district which was the cradle of his family, and had lived for a whole week with the relatives and amid recollections of the dead man. The result was that the young man had begun to entertain very different thoughts and feelings from those he had cherished previously, from those even which had filled this very apartment with their noisy explosion. Gabrielle was coming to the severest trial that can fall on a woman who has been divorced and has remarried: her

son had ceased to side with her completely and unquestioningly. The instinctive attraction which he still felt at the time of writing the letter to tell her of the catastrophe, the loving movement towards her in time of trouble, all were things of the past. He was her "little one" no longer. In spite of himself perhaps, he was now her judge. She had read it before he spoke, in his emaciated features, his burning eyes, his trembling mouth, and at once the question of the marriage with Bertha Planat which had caused her so much uneasiness, was relegated to a secondary place among her pre-occupations.

One little fact, slight but full of significance, marked the difference between their last interview when tenderness mingled with their sorrow, and the meeting of to-day: neither of them rushed to meet the other as before. She hardly so much as rose from the chair in which she was working, to fold him in a long and silent embrace. She would not have had the strength to go to him, so apprehensive was she of this change of feeling in the young man described by Darras. At once, another little detail possessing still more significance, obtruded itself to increase her embarrassment, in the contrast between the full mourning worn by Lucien and her own costume. She had indeed chosen something almost dark, for her delicate feminine sensitiveness had foreseen the contrast. But fearing to offend Albert, she had not ventured to dress entirely in black.

Lucien also started at this visible symbol of the divorce which continued to keep his father and mother apart by a severance more complete than death itself, and when she asked him affectionately: "You have had a bad shock, my poor boy, a bad blow?" it was in a tone of sadness that he replied:

"Yes, mother, greater than I can tell you."

"Oh, but you can," she insisted; "I can listen to it all. Death, you know, obliterates many things, and directly you have anything to cause you grief, and now more than ever, be certain I share it with you."

"I know that," said he, "but to talk of all that even to you would make me ill. He was my father, and, whatever wrongs he was guilty of to you and to me also, when I saw him dying, I felt that at the bottom of my heart I cherished a fondness for him of which I had no suspicion. He died very peacefully. There had been some very painful periods of delirium, but the delirium had passed away. He asked for a priest. I thought I must accede to his wish. After the priest had gone, he had still half an hour of consciousness, in which he spoke to me. Then he sank into a kind of torpor and he expired with no sign of suffering. Ether was injected, but he did not feel it. It was during this last conversation that he entrusted me with a message for you as my letter told you. He wished me, in his name, to ask your forgiveness for not having been all that he ought to you. He may have been guilty of many faults,

mother. I swear to you, he was not a bad man. Do you pardon him? Tell me that you do—I want you to tell me so.”

“I pardon him,” replied Gabrielle simply, when her son at once interrupted her, as if he feared to hear any more.

“Thank you,” he returned, “in his name and mine.” He signed to his mother not to continue and put his hand for a minute over his eyes, making as if to stifle some overpowering emotion. When he recovered himself, he went on:

“You have done me ever so much good, mother, and I wish we could rest here, and not spoil the sweetness of the impression. But there is one other question that must be opened. It would be childish to put it off. Besides it is only the continuation of our conversation the other day when we were not over self-possessed, you or I, or——” He did not name his stepfather, and ended almost roughly: “In fact, you have guessed that it is the question of my marriage.”

“Is it absolutely necessary that we should speak of it now?” said his mother. “I have just seen you so affected. I have been so affected myself. We were at one in our thoughts on this tender subject. Do not let us introduce to-day the questions which sunder us.”

“But we must have this matter settled to-day,” replied the young man conclusively. “Besides, the words you have just employed are sufficient to enlighten me

on your intentions. Allow me to prevail on you to state them distinctly. It will not take very long, and you can vouch that I am not now in a state of excitement. Answer me then frankly and without reserve. I know from my notary, M. Mounier, that you are acquainted with the step I took with regard to my father. I did it and I conceived I had the right to do it because the opposition to my marriage did not really come from you. Had it come from you, I mean from you alone, I should have hesitated before making use of the means the law gave me. It was not against you that I acted. I want to assure you of that. In any case, right or wrong, I did act. You have heard the result from M. Mounier: I obtained my father's consent. Please notice that he gave it with a full knowledge of the facts of the case. I had not hidden from him any of the circumstances in which Mlle. Planat is placed, and I say it with emphasis. He was ill, it is true, and felt he was going, but he was in full possession of his faculties. He wished to show his love for me by placing no obstacle in the way of a union which he understood to be my most passionate desire, and likely to secure my permanent happiness. Had he lived two weeks longer, this marriage would have taken place. His decease renders his consent invalid under the Code. It depends now on you alone to authorise this marriage. Will you endorse or not the last wish my father expressed with respect to my interests?"

“I cannot allow the question between us to be put in such terms as these,” said his mother quickly. Her heart was in her mouth as she spoke, for her son’s last question had touched a smarting wound. “When you spoke just now of pardon, I think I answered you as I ought and in all sincerity. Do not ask me to go further and take account of a wish which I have never recognised as legitimate. You see I was right when I begged you not to open this subject. You force me to say what I would rather have left unsaid. You do not know how unhappy that act you referred to made me, and what tears I shed! You maintain it was not aimed at me. Nor can I allow you to dissociate me from Albert, my husband, the best of men, whom you have called by the name of father so long. He deserved it for his devotion to you, yes, and he deserves it still. In our concern for you we are one. Only yesterday when your letter came what was his first thought, do you think? Only that there might be an end of this cruel misunderstanding between us. ‘Only try to prevent Lucien from leaving this house never to return.’ Those were his own words. And if you knew too how he seized the opportunity to plead for you? I may be wrong, but I will tell you all. He saw this person whom you wish to marry: in what circumstances I need hardly remind you. He had gone to the Place François 1er, because he thought at the time you were the victim of a designing woman. He wanted to speak, you can guess to

whom, and you understand why. Ought not his mere presence in that room and with that object be sufficient to convince you how much you are to him? He never made a greater sacrifice for you. He was anxious to save you at all costs. Chance willed that this young lady and he had an explanation. She produced a very different impression on him from what he had expected. It would be untrue to say that he has entirely changed his opinion of her. He says, however, that we have perhaps judged her a little hastily. You must admit that we had very natural reasons for dreading her. As a matter of fact, if it were shown to us that she is really such as you conceive her, if we had the assurance that she would be a good wife to you, I too might be able, one day, to think more kindly towards her. But that can only be the work of time. So I ask you for time to give a definite reply, and it is only fair to grant me this."

As she spoke these words in which her passionate desire to defend her second husband against the dead man's son was so ingenuously displayed, she had been searching Lucien's eyes for a glimmer of indecision, but she sought in vain. On the contrary, the young man's face had grown darker and even hard. He made no reply immediately. He had risen and began to walk up and down the room. Suddenly he stopped in front of her, and jerking out his words hurriedly, with a curl of the lip he said to her;

"Time? What is the use? There are some things that time cannot change. Time will not alter the fact that M. Darras insulted my betrothed, and me with her, in this very room in a manner which he cannot now make amends for. Time will make no difference; it will still be true that he claimed rights over you at my expense and that I had to go, and you let me, your son, go because this house is not your home but the home of the pair of you. Yes, I must speak out; that is the view I take. Where shall I spend this time you require? Where will my home be, where am I to spend my private life? With you? Now? Never, I could not."

"Lucien," she cried, rising in her turn and taking his hands, "you are not saying what you think. It is not possible that you feel so. It is not true."

"It is only too true," he replied.

"Why too true?" she repeated. "No, oh no! Resentment is carrying you away and making you too hard, too ungrateful. Forget these two horrible weeks. Remember the past. You cannot live with us any longer? Oh! you are too ungrateful. Then you have not been happy here?"

"Yes, I have been happy," replied he.

"You have not been loved? Dare to say so!"

"I have been loved."

"Has not my husband been your best friend for years?"

"He has."

"Then, how can you give utterance to these monstrous words?"

"They are not monstrous, mother; once more they are the truth. There is no question of the past, it is the present and the future we have to deal with. The idea that I was in the way here began to grow on me quite a long time ago. At first it was only jealousy. How I endeavoured to hide it from you! I did not think the better of myself for it. It was not your fault if I suffered because I had no longer the larger part of your affection. There were trifles. Take an instance. You never received a letter from me without showing it to him. When I was with the regiment I tore up ever so many letters, because this annoyed me. Then many little things followed to offend me. It was not his fault either. I called your husband my father. He treated me as a son, exerting an authority which extended to the smallest details of life. How I chafed against this! And then there came his glaring injustice to my betrothed, and I saw his character as it was. It was a bitter blow to me that you should side with him against me in a matter in which I thought he was wrong. Finally, and more than all besides, there came the few days spent with my real father, at the time when I went to see him although almost ashamed to go. The feelings I saw he bore me conquered my heart. I quite understood that he repented. Seated by his bed and chatting with him I listened to his rambling recol-

lections of his wasted life. All went to show me that he had been worthy of better things. He was full of regretful recollections of you, the days of your engagement, of my birth. It was folly, no doubt, but as I listened I could not help dreaming. In thought I lived through the life I should have had with you two if things had been so arranged that you could have stayed with him. Who can tell? The good side of his nature might perhaps have developed. There was so much of it. I gathered this still more completely from what I was told of him by his companions in childhood and youth at Villefranche. I am not accusing you, mother. You had not the strength to put up with his shortcomings beyond a certain point, even for my sake. For you had to take account of me. I bear you no ill-will; but all that has been has become too painful to me in comparison with what might have been. It is not just, perhaps; but I repeat I do not judge you. In your presence I express my feelings aloud. I am going to leave you. I am going to live a life foreign to your ideas and your wishes. I wanted to put all the reasons before you. I am not a bad son. But come back here, and resume my place in your household, as things are, I should not have the strength for it. I should be too wretched."

While Lucien was speaking, Madame Darras had been looking at him without a tear or sob, her eyes fixed on him, in that state of sudden prostration which may be

noticed in the presence of certain catastrophes when excessive grief paralyses all feeling of reaction. She had suffered much in these two weeks; with ever increasing remorse she had been constantly brought in contact with the ever recurring consequences of that second marriage of hers, to which she had only agreed originally after a great struggle with her conscience. But her sufferings had been nothing to this. She was no longer confronted by the consequences of the act. It was the act itself, and her son's smothered complaint made it a present and concrete fact.

With lightning-like rapidity her imagination busied itself with the past and she retraced all the stages which had led her to the climax. First had come the departure from Chambault House. She had thought herself justified at the time. Suppose, however, that she had been still more patient; suppose she had not listened to the lawyer's advice and made that demand for a separation which had increased the resentment of Lucien's father! While the action was going on he had asked her to come back, and yet once again she had refused. Later on, when he had wished to alter the separation to a divorce, she had, still on the same advice, affected to offer no opposition. It was true, though, that she had her share of the responsibility for this divorce; further it was true that in remarrying while her son lived, she had saddled herself with the inability to make any reply if he ever taxed her with sacrificing

him, a terrible charge for a son to make and a mother to hear. To acquit her in her own eyes, her son must never protest against the intrusion of the stranger. He was doing worse than protest. He was leaving her. The family-tragedy which is involved in virtually every divorce was reaching its supreme and logical climax. The second marriage was showing its radical incompatibility with what survived of the first. Was that what the mother had desired? Alas! She had brought it about, and she groaned:

"You repeat that you do not judge me, but to tell me in my own house that you are not at home, that you are wretched near me within these walls, what more cruel judgment can you imagine? But I will not have it. It is a horrible nightmare. I have not heard you, you my Lucien, speak in this way to me. No, I will not believe it. You are too sensitive, and so is Albert. You are both of you proud and shy. I know you so well! You have let a frightful misunderstanding come between you. You must have an explanation. He never knew what you were thinking, I swear it. You will tell him as you have told me, and there will be nothing of it left, nothing."

"Poor mother," replied the young man. "Why should we lie one to the other? Why draw back before the strong and indisputable evidence we have all three had in this very place? My stepfather does not know what I think? Oh yes, mother, he does, and you know

yourself that he does. Why, at this minute and while we are talking, he is over there in his study behind that door and he does not come in here! For what reason, unless because there is not room now for both of us in your circle? And you are so fully conscious of this yourself that you will not go to look for him, you will not challenge this explanation between us and in your presence. You calculate too accurately that it is useless and would be too risky."

"It is necessary," said Gabrielle, "and I will go and look for him."

She walked with a decided step to the door which separated the little drawing-room from the library. Her hand raised the curtain to grope for the handle of the lock, and then she did not turn it. So she stood for a moment, shaking with such a fit of trembling that she had to lean against the frame of the door. Her hand dropped without effecting her purpose. She left the door, which in simple truth she had not dared to open, and came back to her son, saying: "You are right. I am afraid. But do you not understand that I love you both, poor boy; you as much as him, him as much as you? That is why I could not bear to see you confronting one another. Perhaps I was very guilty towards you in my divorce and my remarriage. But I swear to you that at this moment I am more than punished."

"You?" cried the young man, "guilty towards me? You, my dearest mother? Do not say such a thing, I

entreat you, do not even think it." He had made her sit down in a chair and thrown himself on his knees before her, and was kissing her hands. The cry of a tortured soul that had escaped her had shaken him to his very soul.

"I am the guilty person, I deserve the punishment for having gone so far as to give you the impression that I am reproaching you or complaining. I who only came to assure you over and again of my worship and my devotion! I wanted to make you fully understand that, even when gone from the house, I shall keep the best part of my affection for you always, always. You punished? For what? For having been too simple, too sincere, for having believed overmuch that all hearts were like your own. They are not. They are not all kindness, all love like yours, mine among the first. Look at me, dear. Smile at me." And he added sorrowfully: "Remember it will perhaps be a long time before we see one another again."

"It is settled then?" she said with a start. "You are going away from here?"

"Yes," he replied, "you yourself made it clear just now that I am right." And he pointed to the door which she had not had the courage to open. "And you have told me so. After what has passed and with the feelings which I have allowed you to see, I cannot live among you. It is no place for me now. I have met with a woman whom I love and who loves me. She

has all my ideas and I have all her tastes. Our ways of thinking and our principles are identical. She is my wife, the woman with whom I shall be able to make a home such as I dream of. The poor deceased understood this. Will you not do likewise and give your consent to our marriage?"

"No!" said she, releasing her hands from Lucien's entreating clasp. She shook her head and repeated: "No, no, I asked you to wait. Is it too much to require?"

"And I," he broke in, rising to his feet. "I told you why I will not wait. My life is all before me, I want to live it. It is my wish and my duty. Mlle. Planat has been too unhappy and too undeservedly so. I have promised to make up to her in happiness all she has suffered from the cruelty and wickedness of the world. In coming here I foresaw your refusal. I have prepared her for it, and have brought her to consent to the course which I will now tell you. She and I have the same beliefs. We think that the moral worth of marriage depends solely on the tie between the consciences. It was in vain that M. Darras waxed wroth against this idea when I propounded it the other day; I hold to it because it is true, and because I feel it true in all honesty. The only true marriage, the only one which is absolutely unstained by hypocritical convention, is free union. If I have wished in the first instance to marry Mlle. Planat legally, it is only because legal mar-

riage is a public proof of my affection. You object to my giving her that proof for the present. I bow to your will. But we have plighted our troth, she and I. We mean to live together in free union. We shall be misunderstood and slandered. We shall have the approval of our own consciences. We have made up our minds to leave Paris. Had I no other reasons for wishing to go away, I should consider myself bound to spare you the remarks which my life here under such conditions could not fail to occasion in your circle. We shall go to Germany. There my wife will continue her medical studies and I shall start on mine. I have taken a passion for the science of medicine. My betrothed shares it, and we shall work together. In two years I shall be free to legalise a situation which to-day is in my view as honourable as the fine marriages which my friends dream of are the reverse. Mlle. Planat has a child. I do not wish him to go through what I have gone through. We shall take him with us now and he will never know that I am not his father. Mother, I appeal to your sense of justice, and I emphasise the word, for to my mind that is everything: can you think badly of me for living thus?"

"But you," rejoined she, "will you think highly of yourself for having deserted me, your mother, and for having taken no account of the sorrow you cause me?"

"Should I be doing so if I remained here to torture

your heart as just now, tormenting my own the while? I am not deserting you. I am leaving you to your husband, your daughter."

"And without my son," said she imploringly.

"Mother," he replied to this heartrending sigh, "do not rob me of my courage. It must be. It is my duty, towards you even, above all," persisted he, "towards you."

Then suddenly he clasped her in his arms in so passionate an embrace as even to hurt her, and in a low voice said, "Good-bye, good-bye."

Before she could say a word in reply, he had left the little room. Her twice-repeated cry, "Lucien! Lucien!" did not induce him to turn back. As on the previous occasion, she heard the outer door open and shut. A carriage rolled away and completed her certainty; this farewell, so overpoweringly sudden that she remained lost in astonishment, was indeed a reality.

"He is gone," she sobbed, "gone, gone, . . . and he did not even go upstairs to kiss his sister."

CHAPTER X

THE PRISON

THE young man's departure had been witnessed by one other person. We can guess who this was and whether Darras had found the interview a long one. He had too clear a conception of the consequences which might ensue from this meeting between mother and son not to experience anxiety strained to the point of anguish while he awaited the result. Would Gabrielle prevail on Lucien to consent at least to postpone his projected marriage and in the meantime to return to the house, if not as an inmate at least as a visitor? Or would he on the other hand prove an open rebel? Would he put his mother under the necessity of replying "Yes" or "No" immediately, and in the event of a refusal would he go off, more completely estranged from them than before? At the thought of a complete rupture with the son of the first marriage, strangely complex feelings were simultaneously aroused in the divorced woman's husband. Mortal apprehension for the future of his own establishment, dread lest the catastrophe should end in accentuating in Gabrielle those religious anxieties from which their intimacy had

already suffered so severely. His affections were wounded and lacerated. He was genuinely fond of his stepson, he had brought him up and was particularly proud of him. At the same time, shrink as he might from the admission, this rupture was the final obliteration of a past which he so detested that he was conscious of a feeling of savage triumph in the obscure recesses of his heart. He was ashamed to discover in himself once more stirrings of malice unworthy of his character. But one may blush at the thought of meanness and be possessed by it none the less. The interview still went on and his wife did not come to call him. So she could not bring the obstinate young man to reason. Suddenly he too heard the noise of the opening and shutting of the door. The roll of the carriage as it moved away caused him to look out of the window. It was indeed the cab which had brought Lucien and was now bearing him away. Gabrielle had failed? Albert hurried into the little drawing-room, where he found her seated in a chair, motionless, her hands lying on her knees, her head bowed. The final confirmation of her son's secret and unspeakable resentment against her second marriage, his departure with no sign of affection for little Jeanne, had put the finishing touch to her dejection. For the first time she grasped the truth; between the half-brother and the half-sister, on whom she herself lavished an equal wealth of affection, there would never be complete sympathy. It is the greatest

grief of a woman who has borne children to two men thus to recognise that the offspring of her two marriages unconsciously carry on the rivalry of the fathers. So profound was the distress which had overwhelmed her frail woman's spirit, already shattered by one emotion after another, that she did not hear her husband come in. She shuddered like a hypnotised patient snatched from her trance when she recognised him, and taking his hands, she sobbed: "He has gone, and for ever! He means to live in shame with this girl, like the other man, without marrying her. I told him all, your goodness to him, the doubts which the meeting over there had raised in their favour. I asked him not to demand an immediate reply, only to wait. Nothing would do for him. He spoke of going with her out of France to Germany to study medicine, and said he would own her child! He means not to see us again. You had guessed too truly the reason, it is because he hates our home."

"He is under the influence of his father's death," replied Darras. "On reflection, he is bound to return to a more reasonable frame of mind and to the feelings which he naturally cherishes and which are not spiteful. It is certainly very hard on us, my poor darling, but to give way is cowardly in family matters as much as in public life. We have done our duty. Circumstances are against us just now. We have nothing to reproach ourselves with and can still have grounds for hope.

He is going to live, you say, with this girl in free union? After all there is something to be said for free union. It is foolish, but it is not libertinism. When adopted as by Lucien in all sincerity, there is nothing low about it; it is not then a state of shame as you termed it. One thing or the other. Either this girl is honest and will consequently behave herself. In that case, simply out of care for their children, they will be led to make their mock-marriage legal in two years' time. Or, as I fancied at first, she is a designing woman. If so, she will not put up with the humdrum quiet life of a German University. She will throw off the mask and he will not marry her. In either event we shall recover him. Even at twenty-five he must ask for your consent. If this woman has proved that she possesses wifely qualities you will give them this consent, and we shall see them. If, on the other hand, the connection ends in a rupture, he will turn to us for refuge. So be brave and make up your mind that this parting from us was undoubtedly necessary. Yes, now that he has so far given way under some unwholesome influence as to conceive such unreasonable antipathy to our home, it is better that relations should be broken off for a while. At least it is a lesser evil. Courage, dearest, once more! Lean on me. I will love you enough for both."

"You are kind," she replied, without losing her air of dejection, "you are very kind. But how can you

expect me to yield to your arguments? You have said as much, all to the same purpose, in the last fortnight! You have continually shown me that I ought to hope and not to fear, and that Lucien would not persist in his project, and he has persisted. You told me that he would not go to ask his father's consent, and he did go; that you had a sure means to stop this deplorable marriage, and things have gone from bad to worse. Why did you tell me all this, and much more besides? Because you do not wish me to face the truth, and are equally anxious not to see it yourself. And the truth is what Father Euvrard preached to me. God is striking us through my son. I say 'us,' for I do not dissociate you from myself, my friend, my one and only friend. We are united in punishment as we have been in sin. The blow which cuts me to the heart is heart-rending to you also. You talk to me of courage. Have the courage to see straight and to let me see straight. We have lost one of our children, Albert dear. Do not let us lose the other."

Whilst speaking she sat up in the chair, gripping its arm with her hands. Her voice had grown more and more steady, more and more eager. The blood had come back to her cheeks, and in her eyes burned a strange fire which Darras had noticed there too often during this week to be mistaken in it. He started at this evidence that she was again consumed by the mystic fever of religious remorse. Ever since the

arrival of Lucien's note announcing Chambault's death, the second husband had been apprehensive of the dreaded request which the divorced woman, at length a widow, would be inevitably led to prefer by her revived adhesion to the Catholic faith. Gabrielle's importunate tone enabled him to guess the petition hinted at in the enigmatic words with which she had ended, and he asked:

"The other? You mean Jeanne. What connection can there be between our dear little girl and our misunderstanding with Lucien? Explain."

"Why do you speak to me, Albert," she replied, "as if you did not understand, when you understand only too well? Do not tell me you do not. Do not treat me any more as if I were an invalid. The circumstances are too serious, you know. We have had too solemn warnings. We have lost Lucien because we were guilty, myself especially, for I was a believer, in yielding to the terrible temptation of this unholy law of divorce. No human code can prevail against the ordinance of God. In the sight of God I was still the wife of that man for whom my son wears mourning. We took no notice, and now I have no son. That man is now dead. I am free. God who has so punished us, gives us an opportunity to repair our sin. We can return to Him, and be married religiously. Tell me you consent, Albert dear, and will make me your wife in the eyes of the Church. Tell me you will! If not, I shall die. I

shall be too afraid of losing Jeanne as well, somehow or other. I know not how, but I shall be tormented by fear. In her name, in our daughter's name, I beg it of you."

"I was expecting this request," replied Darras. An expression of the utmost sadness had come over his countenance. It reflected that resigned melancholy which comes upon you at the bedside of some one dear to you, suddenly struck down in the full tide of convalescence by a sharp recurrence of the disease which has nearly carried him off and which you thought cured. "I was expecting it," he repeated, "and I bear you no grudge; you have just suffered so severely. There is every excuse for your not seeing our life in quite the right light. I will not try further to prove anything to you. You attribute prepossessions to me in cases where I am only applying the rules of the most ordinary common sense. Five minutes' cool reflection, and at the very outset you would recognise that this episode of Lucien's is but a sequence of very ordinary events such as happen every day in the most Catholic of households where a young man of twenty-three and his parents are concerned. On the other hand I did not expect that you would make this request in the name of our daughter. You have then not grasped what would now be the significance of a religious marriage as regards this child between us, her parents?"

"When you told me in your hysterical outburst the

other week that we were not married, you were able to fathom my indignation. I was not thinking of myself only in protesting against such rank blasphemy, I had Jeanne in my mind. I am still thinking of her at the present moment. For us to be married at church now, after having lived together so many years in accordance with a civil marriage, would be to declare that in our eyes the civil marriage is null and that consequently our daughter is illegitimate. Confess you do not think that."

"I do, I am only too convinced of it," said the mother, "and I tremble with fear for her."

"And you do not feel how foolish, to go no further, is a fancy which leads you to attach any guilt to the birth of this child, over whose cradle we exchanged none but vows of devotion, faith, and affection?"

"No, but I do feel, because I know it and believe it, that we had no right to have her."

"I will not let you talk like this," cried Darras, bewildered and vexed. "Gabrielle," he continued, with a growing sense of irritation which he could no longer control, "do you remember the time when you told me that you hoped to be a mother and the sacred emotion which we both felt at the news? Recollect the fond dreams we wove, both of us here in this very place, for this child. It was to be a girl. We were to make her our joy and pride. Think too how sad we were when, after she had come, we hoped for a boy and how we

regretted that our family stopped with her . . . and now . . .”

“Now,” she broke in, “I have this joy and pride no more. That is true. I shall never have them again. The trial has been humiliation for me. I am crushed for the remainder of my life. I depend on you, Albert, to get a little comfort in my sadness. That I shall get if my conscience is quieted by the sacrament, if I confess and take Communion, and above all if I can embrace you and my daughter without remorse. I must have strength, you know, to bear the thought of my son’s downfall and the life he means to lead with that creature. I shall find it nowhere else. If you love me, do not refuse, and do not discuss it. You dreamed of marrying me when I was a young girl. That marriage would certainly have been a religious one, and you would have consented to it. All that I ask of you is to do to-day what you would have done then. Never will you have given me a greater proof of your love, and I need it so much, so much!”

“Do not persist further,” replied he with still more impatience in his voice, “it is useless. Had I married you in your girlhood I should have agreed to the conditions of marriage at church which your parents would have required. I should not have done so without a severe internal struggle. I was no more a believer then than I am now, and these compromises with conscience are always fatal. They are the source of those moral

hypocrisies which indefinitely prolong the existence of the worst of social lies. At the time, however, the marriage would have implied nothing more than family prejudice and my acquiescence. It would not have constituted an outrage on the honour and loyalty of a whole past life. That is what it would be to-day, the solemn public condemnation of the life we have spent together, the disavowal of our present relations. I will not, even to please you, I will not prove a traitor to life, of which I am as proud as ever, even if you deny me happiness. Are you my mistress, am I your lover, that we should have to get married after having lived together? No, you are no mistress of mine. You are my wife, and I am your husband and no lover. Never, never will I cast this slur on us, on you and me. Never will I insult our home."

"You prefer to break it up," said she, almost savagely. "Yes, if you refuse me this religious marriage, you will have destroyed the home. I shall not remain here. I feel it. I shall not be able. To live with you and bear your name and belong to you and yet not be your wife in the sight of God, when there is nothing in the way but your pride, will be beyond my power. I endured it—yes, but what anguish have I gone through these many days—because there was the invincible obstacle. I said to myself: 'I am doing my duty as a Christian as well as I can in circumstances that are too strong for my will.' As things are now, if you persist in deny-

ing my request, I shall have to go away, go I must. Answer, will you let me go? Why? You talk of outrage, and slurs? Where is the outrage in going through a ceremony which was denied to us, but is now permitted? Where is the slur in a marriage which to you means nothing, because you are an unbeliever? I say again, if you refuse, it is because your pride will have mastered your love. Pride and nothing more. You will not allow your unbelief to give way before my faith."

"And how so?" replied he. "Merely because I consider it cowardly to pretend to opinions which I do not hold? What convictions I have, have not been formed capriciously. I have not been led by self-interest to adopt them. They are the embodiment of my deepest thought, my inmost consciousness. It is not only my right, it is my bounden duty, to act in accordance with them, for to me they represent truth. To go and be married at church, when I have been married and legally for the past twelve years and have looked on this legal marriage as sufficient and perfect, would be to admit that I attach an importance to Catholicism which I do not. When I give a man my hand it is only a form, but I should not do it if I despised the man. You will say that this appearance with you before the priest is also a form and nothing more. But this form is a tacit adhesion to a dogma which I know to be false, to a priesthood which I know to be a fraud, to practices which I know to be fatal. It is already more than enough that

a promise you stole from my love for you, obliges me to see my daughter grow up among these errors. Do not try to take advantage of my loyalty, for loyalty it is. Do not tempt me to betray it. Let us end a conversation which is objectless. We have already quite enough legitimate causes for vexation without inventing imaginary ones."

"This is not your last word, Albert," she begged; "if you are an unbeliever, you cannot, with your sense of justice and tolerance, wish to hinder me from believing."

"When did I hinder you?" replied he sourly.

"But you are hindering me," she groaned, "in forcing me to live with you in a relationship which religion forbids."

"I?" cried he, "I force you? And pray what are you doing when you claim to prescribe for me a course which my principles forbid?"

"Oh!" said Gabrielle protestingly, "how can you compare the two things? You have chosen your principles yourself and you interpret them yourself. Supposing you make this sacrifice for my sake, which you admit is only a matter of form to you, will it make any difference to your future life? Whereas I, if I persist in remaining with you as your wife, while I am not,—for I am not, understand, I am not,—am outside the pale of the Church. The sacraments are denied to me, I cannot have any religious life. I tell you again," she

continued in a tone of blank despair, "I shall not be able to endure it, I shall go away."

"Oh!" replied Darras, now quite beside himself, "you will go! Well and good, but," and his voice echoed the fierce despotic nature of the exasperated man, "if you go, do not mistake the consequences of your rebelliousness. I shall let you go. I will not send the Commissary of Police to induce you to return. Only I shall keep my daughter. When we married we made an agreement. You engaged to become my wife, and I on my part engaged that if we had a child I would consent to its being baptised and brought up in the Catholic faith. You are now pleased to denounce this agreement. So be it. You say you are not my wife? You speak of going away? So be it. But I am free again of my engagement. I take Jeanne back. She belongs to me. The Code gives her to me. The agreement is cancelled, so I educate her after my own ideas."

"You will not do such a thing as that!" cried the mother. "You have no right to do so. You have told me over and over again that one's first duty was to respect conscience. You will not meddle with your daughter's."

"I will give her another," replied the father; "I will bring her up in the truth, whereas you feed her with chimeras, and only my scruples have prevented me from raising objections. I see at last how culpable I

have already been towards the man who will some day marry her, if her childhood's impressions were ever to revive and part her from her husband."

"You would take away her faith!" said Gabrielle. "But to take away the faith of a defenceless creature is a crime, Albert, an abominable crime."

"Are you quite sure," replied he, "that it is no crime to have given her that faith? Ah! take care. Do not awaken in me the idea, which has haunted me so often, that a promise which controverts the truth is no promise, and that consequently I ought never to have made the promise I did. But no! I promised: I will hold to it on condition that you too, having promised, also hold to it. Never again will I hear talk of a religious marriage, you understand me, never again. Such as you married me I remain; if you keep your bargain I will keep mine; if ever you fail, if you put into execution this project of departure, I shall act as I have said."

"Even on the eve of her first Communion?"

"She would not make it, that is all," replied he more harshly, "and so much the better! But once more, let us end this." He looked at his watch and said: "A quarter-past two I am due at the office. When I return I hope to find you wiser. Good-bye."

For the first time perhaps since they had lived in this house, he went out without imprinting a kiss on his wife's forehead, without having even looked at her. His sufferings of the past few days had exploded in a fit of

anger, and he had used too violent language not to feel some regret. He passed from the drawing-room to his own room to get his overcoat and hat, staying a few moments longer than was needed, in the hope that Gabrielle, knowing him to be there, would feel an impulse towards him, and before he went would come to beg him not to leave her thus. She did not come. Then in turn a passionate longing came over him to go back to her. He did not give way to it. His heart suddenly closed at the recollection of certain exclamations wrung from his poor wife in her excitement. He thought of what she had said about their daughter: "We had no right to have her;" and about their home: "I am not your wife. I am not;" and he said to himself: "If I do not show firmness now, where shall we be landed? She must be made to see by my displeasure that she must not begin again." He went out of the house and straight to his office, where he had, as a matter of fact, several important appointments. Neither the various business calls, which happened to be more numerous than usual this afternoon, nor the mental exertions he had to make in discussing sundry points with extreme technical precision, were sufficient to calm the tempest within. Whilst listening to his callers and whilst replying to them, he never ceased to see before his mind's eye his wife's face, with the expression of maddened terror which his implacable language had called up. He was himself conscious of a tightening

of the heartstrings, a fever in the blood, pangs in the breast, a sickening feeling of his whole being. And yet, at the mere thought that on returning home he was to find himself face to face with the same rebelliousness, to combat the same religious mania, and to come into conflict with the same obstinate desire for a marriage which would be an insult to their past, he was seized again with indignation.

Once more he was carried away by the kind of frenzy which had previously displayed itself in his looks, gestures, and spiteful language. Then he had been a prey to unbearable torture: Gabrielle, the tender love of his early youth, the adored companion of his manhood, was identified with that Church with which he had been accustomed to associate every form of error, lying, and injustice. Apprehension of a renewal of an intolerable and endless dispute as soon as they met, certainty that he would go to still greater lengths of violence, with the accompaniment of secret shame and stinging remorse for having hurt his dearest, such were the feelings now aroused in him. So fierce was the tumult of his conflicting emotions that he was anxious not to return home before regaining his self-control. He came back slowly on foot from the Avenue de l'Opéra as far as the rue du Luxembourg by the least direct road, the Place de la Concorde, the Place des Invalides and the exterior boulevards, thus postponing the hour of his return though at heart he thirsted to be at home. It was past

six o'clock when at length he rang at the door of his house. He looked at it, as Gabrielle had looked at it after her visit to Father Euvrard, with longing eyes. The happiness they longed for was still within possibility, but had been sadly compromised. Absorbed in anxious anticipation of the reception he would meet with, he failed to notice the peculiar look of the servant who opened the door to him. He went up to his room; then, as his wife did not, according to the tender practice of their unclouded days, come to ask him if he wanted anything, he resolved to forestall her and show her that he did not bear malice. So he went into the little drawing-room where she must be. She was not there. He went and knocked at the door of her bedroom. She was not there either. Was she waiting in his study? No. This room was empty too. No doubt Gabrielle was busy with her daughter in the schoolroom. Darras mounted the stairs leading to the second floor with a presentiment which changed to real distress when he ascertained that the schoolroom was empty, empty the little girl's bedroom, empty the governess's room. After all Madame Darras might have gone out with her daughter and Mlle. Schultze. He rang the bell. It was answered by the same servant who had let him in, and this time the husband was not unobservant of the man's demeanour. Something serious had happened. What was it? Even at this moment of terrible suspicion the protecting instinct which had always

marked his dealings with Gabrielle, asserted itself, and the questions, which it cut him to the heart to put, were sufficiently vague and circumspect to insure that the drama in which master and mistress were engaged should escape at least specific remark in the servants' hall.

"What time was it when Madame left the house?" he enquired.

"Three o'clock, half-past three," said the servant. "I went to fetch a carriage. In order to get a four-wheeler I had to go as far as Montparnasse Station."

"Tell the maid to come to me."

"She went with Madame," replied the man.

"Oh! of course," said Darras. It left no doubt. A four-wheeler, the maid taken together with the little girl and her governess. Gabrielle had carried out her threat. She had fled! He had the courage to enquire, in the tone of one who mentions a matter of no particular consequence: "Did they have time to pack?"

"The maid and the governess packed everything," replied the servant. "There were four packages. I helped the cabman to put them up: a large trunk, two bags, and Madame's dressing case."

So Gabrielle had fled, and taken her daughter, their daughter, with her!

At the unexpected shock of such news as this, Darras was for the moment so completely taken aback that he did not even seek to learn more. Besides it was hardly

practicable to do so without betraying the secret of this crisis in his home affairs. He told himself it was impossible. The fugitive would come back. Having arrived at the point of a decision to leave, she would certainly be unable to endure the thought of his anxiety. And then she could not possibly have gone without a line to him. He set to work to ransack the room, looking on every table for the envelope addressed to him which she had assuredly left behind. A woman does not leave her house like a criminal in a panic, without informing her husband where to send and whence to expect news. But no! He found nothing. In vain did he rummage among all his own papers in his desk, and all Gabrielle's correspondence in the drawing-room *secrétaire*. Time was passing while the search proceeded, and the butler came to announce that dinner was served. The prospect of sitting all by himself at the table, which had usually welcomed the family now scattered, was too hateful to Darras. He replied that he would not dine at home, and he went out to walk at random in the streets as he had done the other day. On that occasion he had been tormented enough, but he had been far from anticipating a catastrophe which threatened to upset his mental balance altogether. Gabrielle had fled! What a deep hold must not this hateful Catholic dogma have taken of her, to have determined her to escape rather than live with him now that she was sure their home would remain outside the Church! True,

he had allowed himself to give way to strong language that afternoon. But did threats, even savage threats, justify her departure, taking their daughter with her? Why had she done it? To defy him outright to execute the most serious of those threats, on the effect of which he had counted most confidently. It was as if she had clasped their child to her heart and cried to him, "You want our Jeanne; come and take her." "Yes," he replied aloud, as if the challenge had actually been addressed to him, "yes, I will go and take her." Take her? Ah! but where? and how? He had the law on his side. . . . He would have the police force at his disposal. The Code too gave him the right to order his wife to return to the conjugal domicile. This man of generous instincts who had always, except in two passing instances in the last fortnight, made the fullest allowance for Gabrielle's tender sensitiveness, suddenly pictured her alone in a room with the little girl, and the entrance of the sergeant or Commissary of Police. His innate delicacy revolted at the picture. The love in him was again too strong for his resentment. He asked himself, with a feeling of distress from which all trace of selfishness had disappeared: "But where is she?" Where had she found that evening meal which they should have taken together? What had she said to the child? Parted from all the Nouets by her marriage, she had no family to take refuge with. Was she hiding in a convent? Had she gone to an hotel? Darras

rapidly exhausted all possible alternatives, and literally at his wits' end from the complete absence of positive clues, began to fancy that she had flown to Lucien. This fact will show better than any lengthy analysis the disorder to which anxiety had reduced his usually exact and methodical mind. Such a supposition was extravagant after the scene between mother and son that day. It had hardly crossed his tortured brain when it carried conviction with it, and Darras ran rather than walked to the furnished house in the rue Monge where his stepson had taken a room. He knew the address from the commissionaire who had come the first evening to remove the young man's personal effects. To his question the landlord replied that M. de Chambault had gone away that very evening.

"Alone?" his stepfather ventured to enquire.

"Alone," was the reply.

This had been quite a senseless move. In his demented state the deserted husband ventured on another and still more extraordinary step. The rue Monge is quite near to the rue Rollin. He hurried to the latter. Perhaps he might ascertain Lucien's whereabouts from Bertha Planat. At her address he learnt that she too had gone some hours previously. Puritan as he was, he did not scruple to purchase more precise information with a bribe. Lucien had come to take her; she had gone away in company with him for a lengthy absence and without fixing any date for her return. The young

people had carried out the plan which the son had foreshadowed to his mother. This cold, spring evening, rendered still chillier by the drizzle which was beginning, was no doubt the wedding-night of the two lovers whom Darras suddenly envied with all his poor wounded heart. They at least had but one faith, one ideal, one belief. A week or two ago, how passionately eager he had been to save his stepson from this venture. He was surprised at his indifference now that it was over and done. Everything was dwarfed by his overpowering anxiety for his wife. All he saw in this item of news was the certainty that Gabrielle had not come to Lucien to ask for shelter from her husband. But where was she? Suddenly another and not more sensible idea suggested itself. Suppose she had returned to the rue du Luxembourg whilst he was following the chase without clue or bearings! He wanted to persuade himself that, as a matter of fact, she could not fail to have already repented. He took a cab for greater speed and found his house—their house—as empty and silent as when he had gone out. Gabrielle had not even sent him a line to let him have in his solitude at least a token of her and their child's existence.

The night which succeeded this terrible evening was entirely spent by Darras in going to and fro between his study and Gabrielle's room. Violent resolves continued to alternate in him with moods of fond relenting. Now he resumed his project to make the pair of them,

mother and daughter, return by legal compulsion, and in this merciless project, from which his magnanimity had at first recoiled, he now took savage delight. His wife's flight and the abduction of the child constituted such scandalous behaviour, and touched his manly self-respect to the quick. He would take this brutal vengeance to prove he was master. Now, on the other hand, pride and resentment melted in the warmth of the despair and fond regret that tormented him. The bedroom, still filled with his wife's personality, was too strongly eloquent of their intimacy all those years. He breathed the delicate perfume she used, which he always associated with her smile, her glances, her kisses. The large glass of the pale-green wardrobe seemed to have retained the graceful outlines of her dear figure, the bed-pillow to have kept the impression of her head. Over all the bright furniture her shapely hands had wandered. On the carpet were laid out the slippers in which her bare feet usually rested. The chased silver trinkets on the dressing-table had been touched by her even that morning. There was not one of the pictures hung on the gay tapestry covering the walls, but the husband could connect with some little incident in their domestic life. As he thus passed these trifles in review, he noticed that a leather frame, containing one of his portraits, was not in its place on the little corner table. The fugitive had taken it with her. Tears filled his eyes at this token that even when she ran away she had

not ceased to love him. Why, since the first day when she had confessed her reviving devoutness, had he allowed her to become detached from him as he had done? Why these scruples, this shyness which had kept him from her side all these nights? Their misunderstanding would not have been proof against the charm of the caresses which are enough to tear asunder anything that separates a man and woman who love one another as they still loved in spite of years. And now, would she ever come back to brighten anew this deserted room with her beauty, which, suffer as it might from the rude shocks of life, was still as ever irresistible to his heart? And if she came back, would not her remorse infect their old-time delights? Would she not discover sin in a happiness which she would now consider forbidden to her? Was the intoxication of the past gone and for ever? Were they to be denied the reward of long conjugal fidelity, the slow and sweet passing from lawful love to the perfect friendship of boundless confidence, boundless affection? Fool! There was no answer save the empty room where he sought his absent wife and found her not. Seated at the foot of the bed covered with her handiwork, noting the silent aspect of his surroundings, half lighted by the lamp's weak flame, the forlorn husband felt sad, so sad as to wish himself dead there among the relics of his happiness, forever destroyed if his wife did not come back, and if she did, so gravely threatened!

"However, I must make up my mind," said he on the morrow of this sleepless night. Again he had conceived the hope that the morning would not pass without bringing him a telegram or a letter. Every hour increased Gabrielle's guilt towards him and his irritation with her. He forced himself, however, to put the question with as much impartiality as if some one else had been concerned. "What would be any father's rights in a case like mine? What would be his duty? On which side is justice? My right is to have my daughter." We can recall the almost sacred reverence with which he habitually spoke of the articles in the Code relating to marriage. These texts came back to his memory in support of his assertion: "The parties to the marriage, by the sole fact of marrying, contract in common the obligation to nourish, maintain, and educate their children. The wife owes obedience to her husband."

"In common?" he concluded, "but what if the wife refuse to fulfil her wifely duty? What if she rebel? Then, she loses her rights and the father preserves his." By this sophistical argument he sought to quiet a scruple which was bound up with the sum total of his social ideas, which were singularly contradictory, as happens with moralists of his type who combine concern for the general good with the principles of complete anarchical individualism. He was always talking of his conscience, and Gabrielle also had openly referred

to hers. What was she obeying when she asked of him that their marriage should be celebrated in accordance with the Catholic faith? Her conscience. And when she went away? Again her conscience. "A contract once concluded is final," said Darras to himself, when this objection came into his mind. "She was my wife. She was not free to act as she does." But how did he propose to act in asserting his right to recover his daughter? All the second day was spent in debating with himself as to the moment when he should resolve to take the first preliminary step. There was, however, nothing intricate in it. It was merely to consult a lawyer, for he did not wish at any price to have recourse to the police. He knew a very steady and skilful lawyer who was retained by the *Grand-Comptoir*.

To consult him would mean relating to him in the first place the inner history of his marriage, and putting him in possession of the family-tragedy through which Gabrielle and he had passed. That would be to accuse her. Very naturally his feelings veered round, the prospect revived his love and he began once more to repeat over and over again his distressful litany:

"Gone! gone! how could she have done it!"

A second night was spent like the night before; he continued to vex his heart with regrets and his mind with uncertainties, but he ended by deciding: "Further hesitation is cowardly. I will go and see M. Carrier." This was the lawyer's name. So he left the house to go

direct to this man who lived at the other end of Paris. He had, however, waited for the first post. His intention, after his interview with the lawyer, was to make his way to his office. But so unstrung were his nerves, shattered by thirty-six hours of practical sleeplessness and the painful suspense of expectancy, that when he found Carrier out, he experienced a relief very contrary to the habitual logic of his vigorous will. His return after this journey to the rue du Luxembourg was only a minor weakness. Return he did, however, and reproached himself for his childishness in so doing. Considering that Gabrielle had for two days kept from his knowledge the place to which she had retired after her extraordinary departure, what reason was there for her to send him any information now? So slight was his hope of the message which he yet so anxiously desired, that he stood almost as thunderstruck as he had been at her flight, when he noticed on the tray in the hall where letters were laid, not indeed any letter or missive but a plain square card on which he read the name of M. l'Abbé Euvrard, member of the Institute. The Oratorian priest had scribbled in pencil: "Will return at two o'clock if M. Darras will be good enough to see him." Below he had added his address. Two o'clock? It was then eleven. Darras did not reflect. He did not consider what he would say to the priest, nor whether he might not impair his own authority in the negotiations to be undertaken by this show of haste

to meet his wife's emissary. For undoubtedly M. Euvrard came on behalf of Gabrielle. With this evidence in front of him Darras could not face delay. Three long hours meant a world of torment to him which he would not and could not put up with, and within fifteen minutes of receiving the card he was in front of the old house in the rue Servandoni. The thought that Gabrielle had come there unknown to him, that she had asked for the priest's rooms of this very doorkeeper, had crossed this very court where the little garden blossomed in the middle, and mounted those same steps on the wretched wooden staircase, threw her husband back into the anger of his worst moments. It was such a bitter grief to him that his wife should have approached an intermediary instead of writing to him. And what an intermediary? The man whom they had discussed, and about whom they had exchanged such bitter words. His indignation found expression in the imperious ring which announced his visit and the aggressive tone of his first remarks. The proscribed monk came to open the door as he had to Madame Darras on another occasion, and, as then, he held in his hand a piece of white chalk, having been interrupted in the middle of his calculations by the summons at the bell. He still had the shy and embarrassed look of the learned man astray in the world of life. His cassock was only a little more threadbare, the reddish hair turning grey a little longer, the room into which he ushered his

visitor a little more crowded with books, papers, and pamphlets. But this time his clear blue eyes did not for a moment betray the bewilderment of the thinker only half awakened from his studies. At the first glance he had guessed the identity of this man with the thin face wrinkled with care, the black eyes burning with fever, abrupt in manner and harsh in voice; and he, to accomplish his charitable task, had immediately discovered in himself the priestly energy which had so struck Gabrielle on her first visit, when the ridiculous figure, who first appeared in the hall, had in her presence been transformed into an apostle, fiery, eloquent, and dignified. He did not allow himself to be disconcerted by the brusque manner in which the opponent of all he held sacred opened this painful and awkward interview.

"I found your card at my house, Sir. I am M. Darras. It is highly important to me to learn what reason you have for wishing to speak to me, and I have accordingly come to see you at once. I am at your service."

"What I have to say to you, Sir, is of such pressing importance," replied the priest, "that I took the liberty of calling on you quite early. You understand," he added a minute later, "that I am entrusted with a message from Madame Darras?"

"One question first, Sir," interrupted Darras. "Have you seen Madame Darras, and did she tell you

by word of mouth what she wishes you to acquaint me with, or did she write to you?"

"I saw her," said the Oratorian.

"Then allow me," continued the husband, "to express my surprise that you did not insist on her addressing herself to me direct. In view of the high opinion I had formed of M. Euvrard, the distinguished mathematician whose talents my friends and I admire, I confess it caused me some surprise to learn of your first meeting with her on a previous occasion. I am not, Sir, an illustrious scholar like yourself; but if a married woman came to consult me, without her husband's knowledge, on a matter connected with her marriage, I should stop her on the spot. It is true that I am not a priest either; I am merely a man of honour who simply professes a layman's morality."

"I know, M. Darras, that the dress I wear is an object of great suspicion to you," replied Father Euvrard in a mingled tone of gentleness and firmness which impressed his hearer in spite of himself. "When I went to call on you just now, I knew to what I exposed myself. But you are right; a priest is not altogether like any other man. He has specific duties, to accomplish which he relies on a judgment which is not of this world. Such a duty I discharged on the first occasion when I received the confidence of Madame Darras, without her telling me her name or any details of her life, except that she had need of my help in my capacity of priest.

Such a duty I again discharged when I agreed to be her ambassador to you. You have been good enough to express your high opinion of my modest labours. Do me the credit to believe that I have not strayed from my studies," and he pointed to the table still covered with his algebraical hieroglyphics, "without an extremely serious motive. My motive is the profound pity I experienced for a soul in distress. Had I for instance chanced to be with Madame Darras in a railway accident and she had been hurt, you would consider it quite natural that I should come to acquaint you? The mission which I have allowed to be entrusted to me is identical in character."

"There is this difference," replied Darras, "that it was no mere chance that brought you into contact with Madame Darras. She came to seek you, and you gave her advice. Besides, let us have done with futile comparisons. You know my religious views, and any reference to the subject is idle. It is a blow to me that my wife has chosen you as her intermediary. But she has chosen you, and after all she was within her strict rights. Once more I am all attention."

"She did not come in search of me," corrected the Oratorian, "she came to seek the Church. How and why did this longing, this need rather, of religion in her life with all the practices involved therein, arise in her with so profound, so imperious, so irresistible a call? That is a question, Sir, we will not touch upon. We

should explain it on too contradictory grounds. It is enough that we have established the fact and established it in indisputable fashion. Her first visit furnished me with a proof, and still more striking evidence is to be found in the pitch her sufferings reached, inducing her to rush from her own belongings, to fly from you whom she loves so dearly, and to fly from her home, when she thought she understood that you would never agree to the proposal for a religious marriage on the one hand, and that on the other her daughter's Catholic education was threatened."

"That is false," broke in Darras, "her education has never been threatened, at least not by me. Madame Darras cannot have told you that. When I married her I agreed to allow our children to be baptised and brought up religiously. I have always kept my word. She has herself released me by breaking her side of the agreement in going away. No, her daughter's education was not threatened. If it is now, it is the mother's fault, entirely hers. In our last conversation when she declared that she could not live with me any longer, I warned her that if she went I took back my daughter and all my right to bring her up according to my own ideas. She has gone: I shall take back my daughter, I shall bring her up according to my own ideas. The responsibility will lie with her mother."

He had spoken with so much bitterness in his tone that it might have been Gabrielle herself actually fac-

ing him instead of the old ecclesiastic with the tattered cassock, who listened and looked at him with a singularly penetrating glance.

The simple fact that the husband, so reserved in all that concerned the privacy of his home, entered on this discussion, showed with what respect M. Euvrard's attitude already inspired him, in spite of all his prejudices. It indicated also some uneasiness of mind at this question of conscience which the most determined fanatics do not solve without anxious thought, this uprooting of the idea of God from a child's heart. Darras' tone contained a suggestion of protest against this responsibility which did not escape the quick notice of the Oratorian, who enquired:

"And now, if Madame Darras returned home, would you consider yourself released from your engagement?"

"If she returned?" said Darras eagerly. "That is what she charged you to ask me? She wishes to return?"

"Our conversation has strayed from the point," said M. Euvrard without replying directly to his questioner's urgent demands. He had resumed his methodical tone, in which there reappeared the habits of orderly and lucid explanation contracted in front of the blackboard. "I was about to explain to you on her behalf what feelings determined her without premeditation to a violent step so opposed to her character. Her judgment has speedily

grasped the fact that she must not hold to her resolve. Her choice of the spot to which she withdrew will satisfy you, Sir, of this: even at this moment she is thinking of you and her daughter. She wanted to be able to give a plausible excuse for this departure to the child, the governess, and the maid. She is at Versailles, at the Hotel *** (he gave the name). She pretended doctor's advice and said you were coming to join them. Arrived there and reviewing her act in solitude, she came to the conclusion that by her impulsive flight she had only succeeded in supplying a weapon against herself. More than anything, the thought of your sorrow drove her to despair. She thought of coming back almost as soon as she had gone. Her fears for the future of her daughter's religious education returned in full force and stopped her. You may guess what a time she has passed, poor woman, now expecting from hour to hour some manifestation of your anger and to have her daughter taken from her in the name of the law, now basing hopes on your affection and imagining that you would grant her what she desires so passionately. When she went away she said to herself: 'My daughter belongs to me, I will protect her.' She thought of going to see a lawyer. She had not the strength to do so. It was too painful to her to relate this sad story to a third person. She had told me part of it already. In that earlier visit she had been conscious of exciting my sympathy. She knew that you were acquainted with my

name and my works. She had told you that she had been here once. Briefly, in her agony of unrest she had recourse to me. She came yesterday afternoon. She sat where you are sitting now. Ah! Sir, had you seen her tears, had you heard her sobs, you would not refuse this concession to her beliefs which she asks of you again to-day through my agency. To force a person to choose between her faith and her love, between her conscience as a Christian and the dearest affection of her heart, when a word from you would put an end to the terrible struggle, I appeal to your sense of justice, M. Darras, for I know that justice is a creed with you, is it just? More plainly, is it human?"

"And I, M. Euvrard," replied Darras, "I will ask you whether it is human, whether it is just to come and say to a man: 'Twelve years ago you established a home with all the loyalty, all the affection you were capable of; for twelve years all your work, your trouble, your life has been for this home. You maintained its honour against the prejudices of the world. You were proud of it, you loved it. All your existence, all your joy in life were centred in your feelings of husband and father. Now you must declare that this never was a home, that you had no right to establish it, that your wife was never your wife but remained throughout those twelve years the wife of another man, that you admit this, and that your daughter was born in a state of immorality. Yes, you must make public declaration of

this, without believing it, before the representative of a religion contrary to your most steadfast convictions, in fact you must cover yourself with dishonour in the past and in the present. Otherwise your wife will leave you. You will be compelled to dispute your child with her by legal process, you will keep lonely vigil in the home which was so dear to you.'

"Yet this is the ultimatum which Madame Darras delivered to me when she left her house and which she delivers to me through your agency at this moment. I would not accept it the day before yesterday and I cannot accept it any more to-day. You have acquitted yourself of your message from her, will you be good enough to undertake a message from me: 'If she does not return to the rue du Luxembourg within forty-eight hours she shall never set foot there again.' I can still pardon her action as the outcome of a sudden impulse as you yourself describe it. If her absence is prolonged and consequently becomes deliberate, the offence would become singularly aggravated in my eyes. I should discern in it, I will not mince my words, a most abominable attempt at levying sentimental blackmail. Repeat these terms to her, I stand by them, and add that in the event of her refusing I shall stick at nothing to recover my daughter, at nothing. If she returns I will receive her and will forget these two days of aberration. But I must have a guarantee. She insulted me by her threat to go, she insulted me by going, she has

insulted me by making me speak through a third person. I must have her undertake not to repeat her proceedings. With that object I require, understand, M. Euvrard, I require that she shall admit her fault. She must formally declare that she withdraws all she said to me in our last conversation, which I proceed to set out precisely. She said that with simply a civil marriage she did not consider herself duly married; she must retract this and allow that such a marriage is valid. She said that the birth of our child was a crime, and that we had no right to have a child; that she must retract. She must promise never again to make any allusion to marriage at church. In default of this, all will be at an end. I will have no more of this religious war beneath my roof. I know Madame Darras. She is too loyal to break a solemn promise. That is why I require one from her. If she refuses to make this recantation and this promise which is only a pledge of peace for the future, it is because she does not want peace. In that case it is better to make an end at once, and in that case I refuse to receive her back. These are my terms."

"They are hard, Sir," returned the priest, "they are very hard."

"They are wise," said the husband, rising to indicate clearly that he did not mean to prolong a conversation which could have no further object.

"Allow me to make one further point clear," said

M. Euvrard, who had also risen. "If Madame Darras refused these conditions, you would persist in your resolve to recover your daughter from her?"

"That of course," said Darras.

"You would not, however, prevent her from seeing her?"

"That again is a matter of course. It will be a question for the lawyers to settle."

"You would not leave her to her mother for the present, until she had made her first Communion?"

"That she should never make," said Darras. "I told Madame Darras so before. If I recover my daughter I take her not materially but morally also, and from the first, I repeat, my intention will be to employ without restriction the right which I had abdicated to direct her education."

"And you are indignant," said M. Euvrard, "that a Christian mother should have trembled to see you in such a frame of mind, should have lost her head and been eager to save her child's faith by tearing the child herself from your reach?"

"She had only to remain, I should never have broken my promise to let her train up her daughter religiously."

"I will again put to you my question of a minute or two ago," returned the Oratorian, "which you did not answer: if your wife returned now, would you consider yourself released from that promise?"

"No," said Darras after a moment's silence. His passionate features showed traces of the fresh embarrassment created by this very direct question which he had at first evaded. "I should have no right, for things would revert to the *status quo*. I do not intend that Madame Darras shall be able to point to a single slip on my part from the moral contract which we signed together. You have told me that justice is my religion. That is true, and I will give you a proof. I will not take advantage of the soundest of pretexts, though it would relieve me from a clause in this contract which has always been a great trouble to me and is now hateful. Still it is but a pretext, no more. No, no, I will not avail myself of it."

Father Euvrard had the reply on his lips: "Then wait and renew the promise to your wife herself," but he left the words unsaid. As a matter of fact it had been arranged with Madame Darras on the previous evening that she should come to him at noon to hear the result of the effort he was to make in the rue du Luxembourg in the morning. In twenty minutes she would be here. From the moment when he had ushered Darras into his study the priest had constantly had in his mind the possible result of such an interview and the shock it would cause. Since last evening and directly after Madame Darras had arrived to tell him of her imprudent flight, he had foreseen the eventuality of the free-thinker's giving way on this matter of a religious mar-

riage, and, without Gabrielle's knowledge, he had taken steps to render the ceremony as easy as inflexible regulations would permit. He had been to the Archbishop and had requested and obtained dispensation from all public notice and from the invalidating circumstances involved in the present situation of the Darras family. He had gone on to the Vicar of Saint Sulpice. From him he had succeeded in obtaining authority to perform the marriage himself. He had only to procure two witnesses, two for instance of the staff of this church of Saint Sulpice, a few steps away, and the marriage could be celebrated in this little room. A few words spoken in his presence and the presence of these witnesses, and Gabrielle and Darras were one in the sight of the Church. But Darras was resolute in his cruel opposition which threatened to part forever these two devoted and sincere souls. Was it resolution or embittered obstinacy? M. Euvrard did not venture to risk the alternative. What if Darras, unexpectedly encountering his wife, were to give way to such an outburst that it would be impossible for her ever to make up her mind to go back? What if his prejudices against the Church led him to rebel against facilities in which he would refuse to see more than empty formalities, instead of recognising therein praiseworthy parental indulgence? So the prudent Oratorian kept silence. He thought the *dénouement* was not ripe and let his visitor depart. Then he sank into a train of thought, so deep that he

was only roused by the repeated ringing of the lady whom he was actually expecting, and over whose future he had been reflecting with the absorption of a theologian engaged in considering one of the most delicate and sorrowful problems of conscience.

"You found him at home?" she asked, as soon as she entered. Her impatience to learn the truth was changed to genuine distress when M. Euvrard replied:

"He has just left here. A quarter of an hour ago you would have met him."

"And his answer?"

"He refuses."

"My God!" she groaned, clasping her hands, "have pity on me. And he will still have his daughter?"

"Yes; I suggested to him, as we had agreed, that he should let her remain with you till her first Communion. Again he refused. He charged me to convey his terms to you, for he dictates terms for your return. He will have you recant on all points, and declare that you recognise the absolute validity of your present union, and give him your solemn promise never to speak to him again of a religious marriage."

"I will not be guilty of such cowardice, Father," exclaimed Gabrielle, "I will not give this promise. I would rather not go back. I will take to flight. I will go abroad with my daughter under a false name. Anything rather than deny my faith and further offend that

God who has so punished me. Ah, I have sinned, but His hand is heavy on me."

"But it will grow lighter," said the priest, "and that soon. Have trust. I have reported to you this message from M. Darras only to prove to you how right I was to dread the consequences of your thoughtless departure. I have not yet told you all. We spoke of your daughter, twice. The second time, I succeeded without an effort in prevailing on M. Darras to renew his promise that he would respect her religious education if things reverted to the *status quo*;—these were his own words,—that is to say, if you returned."

"Yes," said she, "he thinks he holds me then, and he is only too right. It is a fiendish calculation and I should not have thought him capable of it."

"Do not be too hard on him," replied Father Euvrard. "He does not deserve it. I listened to him and watched him carefully. He is a man of absolute honesty. He wishes you to return to him because he loves you and looks on you as his lawful wife. He will respect your daughter's religious education because he had promised to do so. He will do so from a sense of duty, without any calculations, I assure you. As regards the Church, he is in what we call a state of invincible ignorance, the deeper because of his proficiency in science, whose misdirected energies are one of the great failings of our age. He looks on religion

through prejudices which he takes for scientific ideas. He has never verified them. Will he ever do so? I hope he will. To that end he must see Christian virtues about him. These he would have seen, and you would have obtained all that he now denies you if you had refused to marry him twelve years ago. Loving you as he did, what would have been his impression when he realised that you remained faithful to your husband in spite of insult and desertion, that to you the Sacrament was indeed the sacred thing which nothing can impair: when he saw you display all the qualities you have, in a spirit of self-renunciation and trust in God? He would have understood, what your child's piety has brought home to you, that there was supernatural strength behind you. But a mistake once made is irrevocable. You recognise the lesson, but you cannot get him to see it. That is your supreme trial. I told you the other day that it is not so easy to escape from certain paths. Divorce is one of these paths. You are its captive, even now when it makes you shudder and when you have beheld all its fatal train of consequences, in you, around you, in your son in his relations with his stepfather, in the sad connection he intends to contract, in your own relations with him and M. Darras. This refusal to agree to a religious marriage is the last of these consequences. But how to escape from it?" continued he, resting his elbows on the table, with his face in his hands in an attitude of

deep thought, "yes, how to escape from it? The rule is absolute: you are not married to this man. On the other hand, there is the safety of your daughter's soul to consider and through her perhaps her father's safety. If you do not go back, no more religious education for the child, increased irritation with the Church on the father's part. And you, if you return? Ah, it is to prison, to prison." Then, after a fresh pause, which seemed interminable in length to the poor woman who also sat silent and dejected, watching her fate debated in the mind of this great scholar-saint, he went on: "You can try to return to-day with your daughter. You must not consent at any price to the condition which M. Darras has laid down, you must not recant, not at any price. He will see you. You will say to him: 'Here I am, I have brought back the child, I have come back; but deny my faith I cannot. If you require that, I must go away again.' If he does require it, you will have to go again. If he does not insist further, if his emotion at recovering you is stronger than his pride, if he gives way on this point, then you will have a right to hope that some day he will give way on the other. I told you he was honest. There is the key to his possible change of front. He will grasp three facts. He will see, firstly, as he is already beginning in his despair to realise, that your faith is very true, very profound, very sincere; secondly, that you are making the greatest of sacrifices for your

daughter's education, and that there lies the only tie between you now, there and there alone; and lastly, that there will be no more happiness for the pair of you, so long as you are burdened with this load of remorse. On the day when these three facts become patent to him, a struggle will begin to declare itself in his mind. And I," pointing to his crucifix, "I shall pray that God will do the rest."

Some hours later when Albert Darras, returning from his office at the *Grand-Comptoir*, where he had spent all that afternoon in a state of devouring anxiety, arrived at his house, he thought, and his heart beat frantically, he thought that he noticed the curtain move behind the window of the little drawing-room on the first floor, and saw a figure, which he knew too well, on the watch for his return. It was Gabrielle waiting for him in such a state of excitement that, though she rose to go to meet him, at the sound of his step she fell back on her chair.

When he caught sight of her thus, quite pale, her eyes tired, her cheeks wrinkled, and over her forehead two grey spots where a fortnight earlier her hair was still golden, a wave of infinite pity swept over his heart.

She stammered, "M. Euvrard has told me your terms." "My terms," he broke in, "there are no terms. There is only you, you here, you my love,

whom I have found again and will never let go any more."

He seized her in his arms, and took her poor feverish hands and kissed them, sobbing the while, and strained her to his heart. She looked at him with a depth of melancholy in which, however, there shone a glimmering of hope. The experiment which the old priest had suggested to her without venturing to advise it, had succeeded. Her grief had overcome Albert's pride on one point. Would the rest of the work be accomplished as the Oratorian had shown to be possible? Gabrielle would fain hope so, and she said to the father: "Go upstairs, my dearest, and embrace your daughter," thus placing at once between them the child for whose sake she had returned and whose piety, which she had sacrificed so much to protect, would perhaps some day win for her the reward of that true marriage for which she so passionately yearned. But when would it be? And if, as was very probable, Albert did one day yield the point out of pity, would he forgive her for it? Would she not find in him also that shame at breaking faith with his most cherished convictions which she was conscious of at the moment? Was there any outlet from the situation in which they had been landed by their marriage after her divorce? And feeling herself the prisoner of this divorce, as the priest had so profoundly remarked, the mother of Lucien and Jeanne cursed once more the impious law, to whose seductions

her feminine weakness had succumbed. Destructive of family life, subversive of religion, the source of anarchy and revolution, this law had promised her freedom and happiness, and all she found, like so many of her sisters, was captivity and wretchedness.

THE END

